

## Television News and Its Satirical Interpretation in Medvedev's Russia: Is Glasnost Back?

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# RUSSIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION

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Edited by

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# RUSSIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION

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## EDITORS' PREFACE

# TELEVISION, NATION BUILDING AND THE EVERYDAY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS AND GALINA MIAZHEVICH

## TELEVISION, NATIONHOOD AND THE ORDINARY

When one thinks of nationalism and television in a Russian context, it is the terms “heroic”, “bombastic”, “propagandistic” and “grandiose” which come to mind, rather than notions of ordinariness and the everyday. Without altogether ignoring the conventional forms of nationalistic broadcasting which are more commonly associated with the official Russian media, and which have their own “everyday” dimension, we aim in this special issue to explore the possibility that television in Russia is not altogether unfamiliar with the other, more subtle variety of nation building, even if those who control and manipulate its output may not be aware of this fact. For it is one of the features of the latter, that it works most effectively when it passes unnoticed by producer and/or consumer, having surreptitiously penetrated the recesses of a national unconscious shared, albeit in unequal measure, by both.

It was Michael Billig (1995) who first coined the term “banal nationalism” to describe the everyday images of a nation which help to build a sense of solidarity and belonging within a national community, and which are to be sharply distinguished from the more extreme forms of xenophobia and militaristic patriotism that are often associated with the term “nationalism.” The kinds of images Billig had in mind are almost limitless in their variety, and their ability to reach into the recesses of the ordinary lives of a nation’s citizens: sporting occasions, the parameters of “the domestic” in the structure of news broadcasts, jokes and everyday myths centring on national character, national rituals such as the Opening of Parliament in the UK, or Independence Day celebrations in the US, music and art with strong national associations, the images on banknotes, etc. The key value of such images to

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nation builders, according to Billig, is precisely their ordinariness; their daily recurrence and their ability to pass unnoticed means that they are capable of penetrating into the depths of the national psyche.

Billig is convinced that the enduring power of banal nationalism disproves the notion that globalization has weakened the importance of the nation state. Indeed, one of the phenomena we habitually associate with globalization — the growth of communication technology capable of linking people across vast spaces and of reducing the time difference separating them to zero — is one of the main tools of banal nationalism. As Benedict Anderson (1983) demonstrated a decade earlier than Billig, the modern media's ability to compress time and space has been central to the construction of the "imagined communities" on which nationhood *per se* rests. The quintessentially nation-building medium is in this sense, of course, television. It enjoys ease of access (requiring high levels neither of literacy, nor of attention). It utilises a "live" mode of communication. Its production tends to be centripetal (television requires a level of resources and access to frequencies which mean that it is ideally run at the national level). Yet it can be offered at relatively low cost to consumers (whether via a licence fee, or via advertising revenue), meaning more or less every household in the western world boasts at least one television set, and ensuring maximum penetration. All these advantages are summed up in the term "broadcasting" which we associate most closely with television.

Despite the advent of new technologies, such as the Internet, and the increasing prevalence of "narrowcasting," predictions of the death of television are highly premature and it appears to be demonstrating the same durability as the nation state with whose fate it is bound up. A Europe-wide survey conducted in 2005 confirmed television as the most important information source for most people.<sup>1</sup> The findings have been repeated in several surveys conducted since then. It is by no means certain that the "media convergence" we read so much about nowadays will necessarily favour the newer of the convergent media. Television's propensity to mutate, and to adapt with the times, taken together with Raymond Williams' (1974) still pertinent caution against the "technological determinism" according to which technology drives socio-political function rather than the reverse, suggest that national broadcasting via the small screen is likely to remain important to governments across the world, and a feature of our daily lives, for some time to come.<sup>2</sup> It is presumably

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<sup>1</sup>See "TV remains main information source," *UPC Television Survey 2005*, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/infosociety/survey-tv-remains-main-information-source/article-151183> (retrieved 8 June, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>Ironically, but significantly, Williams's caution was directed against the notion that the technology of television, at the time he was writing, the "newest kid on the block," would dictate the uses to which the medium would be put and its role in our daily lives.

for this reason that in Russia, to which we will turn shortly, the state continues to invest significant amounts of money in national television broadcasting.

Elsewhere, the relationship between state and medium is less instrumental. In the USA, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) operates on something of a shoestring, outspent by its commercial rivals, virtually bereft of central support and reliant on perpetual “pledge drives” to secure voluntary contributions from its loyal audiences. But it is in part this relative autonomy from both the state purse, and from big business, which endears it to many Americans who are all the more inclined to appreciate its independence and its capacity to embody certain authentically American values. In the UK, by contrast, in which the state has traditionally taken more of an active role in supporting broadcasting, the new Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, has recently seen fit to assure Britain’s primary national broadcaster, that commercial pressures and technological developments notwithstanding, he will be “the most pro-BBC Tory leader ever.”<sup>3</sup> And the BBC retains pride in its remit as purveyor of national values. As it states in one of its own reports, “One of the BBC’s purposes is to represent the UK to itself, and it is important that, over the whole of the BBC’s output, it is a picture that the audience recognises from its own experience” (BBC Trust, 2007, p. 30).

It is not difficult to understand why television remains so vital to nation states, nor to identify particularly powerful examples of “banal nationalism” specific to the televisual medium, often reflected in the emergence of specific genres and subgeneric conventions. Thus, the recurring routines of the evening news bulletin, down to the creation of a slot for the national weather forecast, are only one amongst many television rituals which work to reinforce the sense of national community both Anderson and Billig had in mind. There has, in this context, recently been a spate of scholarly interest within the media studies fraternity in what hitherto tended to be dismissed as mere “light entertainment.”<sup>4</sup>

Then there are what Dayan and Katz call “media events,” those long-planned, major televised national occasions — sports events, national holidays, charity competitions, celebrations, etc. — when “organizers and broadcasters resonate together” in the portrayal of “an idealized version of society” (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p. ix, 14). It is significant that the effects of internationalisation and the development of genres and modes of representation born of the internet age have in no way lessened television’s capacity for generating new forms of media event: Eurovision (treated in one of our contributions) and the Big Brother “eviction nights” are cases in point.

Still more prevalent, perhaps, are the television serials, sitcoms and soap operas grounded in the everyday lives of ordinary families dominating national schedules

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<sup>3</sup>See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/apr/27/david-cameron-pro-bbc-leader> (retrieved 9 June, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> See in particular Bonner, 2003.



throughout Europe. They serve a vital function in perpetuating national stereotypes of normality (for example, that of the nuclear family) as well as in facilitating a nation's ability to absorb social change (the sympathetic treatment of characters from ethnic minorities in soap operas; changing national attitudes to gender roles and sexuality as in serials like *Sex and the City* for instance), and in promoting, via their narrative trajectories, nationally acceptable myths of success and social mobility (the Latin American serial, with its "escape route" for the "poor girl from the provinces"). Again, we treat several instances in the articles to follow.

We might also refer to the increasing prevalence of so-called "lifestyle programming." This, of course, is a global phenomenon, and features a set of internationally recognisable program formats (the "cooking show," the "home improvement show," etc). But for this very reason, national variants on such formats are well placed to negotiate a particular culture's attitudes to consumerist philosophy and to integrate the consumer mentality into national identity structures.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, we can never underestimate the significance of collective memory in the construction of national identity, nor the role of "everyday television" in underscoring that significance and putting it to work to nation building effect. Illustrations include (i) television dramas which treat themes from a nation's history, (ii) series devoted to nostalgic recollections of fashions and lifestyles during periods in a nation's past (the BBC's recent series treating British life in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s comes to mind), and (iii) the televising of annual commemorations of national, and, indeed, international, events and tragedies. When it comes to the latter (recalling international events), and as with "universal" formats such as the "gardening program," television's very immersion in the global communications environment equips it to perform the mediation of national and trans-national so central to contemporary identity construction. A recent example — that of the now annual ritual of commemorating the terror attacks of 9/11 — is analysed in one of our contributions to this special issue.

## RUSSIA: A SPECIAL CASE?

On the face of it, nothing we have said so far would seem not to apply to television's relationship with "banal nationalism" in contemporary Russia. In fact, in some cases, the phenomena we have adduced apply more clearly in Russia than elsewhere. At the same time, there are particular features of Russia's recent history, its political culture, the forces shaping its national identity, and the status of its media, which give the phenomena an unusual, if not unique, resonance. Our special issue sets as its main task the identification of this resonance.

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<sup>5</sup>For a comprehensive treatment of lifestyle television, see Palmer, 2008.

As the largest nation state in the world, and as one covering 6 different time zones, Russia undoubtedly provides particularly fertile territory for television's spatio-temporal compression function — a function all the more important, then, to the country's nation builders. But perhaps more important than this, Russia is, unlike the USA or the countries of Western Europe, a new entity, still struggling to carve out an identity for itself in the aftermath of the sudden collapse of the Soviet empire over which it held sway until as recently as 20 years ago. The death of that empire was, moreover, bound up with the revolution in global communication which made its isolation from the forces of the global market ever harder to sustain. Television, in fact, was at the forefront of the ill-fated glasnost campaign which was Gorbachev's attempt to take account of the revolution, whilst maintaining the Soviet Union intact (we examine the fate of glasnost in daily news programming in one of our contributions to follow).

It is hardly surprising that television should be accorded a vital role in the effort to forge a new identity from the wreckage of the old. Indeed, the continuing importance of television in Russia at the heart of the new media era is still more emphatic than in other western societies. Numerous recent surveys confirm this. To quote from one conducted in 2009 by the respected international NGO, The Committee to Protect Journalists, and based on research done by the BBC:

Television continues to be the predominant source of information. In Russia, popular newspapers measure circulation in the hundreds of thousands... the BBC said. By contrast, Channel One, the highest-rated national station, reaches more than 98 percent of Russia's 142 million people (Ognianova, 2009).

The report goes on to point out that "internet penetration remains low — about 18 percent in Russia" and that the majority of Russians receive their information from national television (ibid).

It was under Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, that the "Russian Idea" mission was launched, to a great fanfare of publicity, on what is now Channel 1 Television. Owned by a combination of the government and business interests linked closely to the Kremlin, the latter is, in its current incarnation, Russia's flagship broadcaster and the successor to the Soviet Union's main national television channel. Like its predecessor, it is effectively a state propaganda tool, a National State Broadcaster, rather than a Public Service Broadcaster like the BBC in the UK, or PBS in the USA. In the 1990s, under the misleading name of Russian Public Television (ORT), Channel 1 was part owned by a business conglomerate led by Boris Berezovsky, an oligarch and close ally of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president. Whilst never independent of the influence of the Yeltsin government, ORT was accorded relative freedom of manoeuvre, reflected in programming that did not always precisely toe the official line. It was swiftly restored to its original name, and status as state mouthpiece,

following Putin's election as President in 2000, and his populist campaign against Berezovsky and other oligarchs.

Since 2000, Channel 1 has, without reverting entirely to totalitarian type, been enlisted in a nation-building campaign launched by Putin to restore Russian pride from the humiliations it had endured under Yeltsin. It is accompanied in this mission by the Rossiia channel, owned entirely by the government and intended to place an emphasis on the representation of Russia's many regional interests. The third main national channel, NTV, is now also owned by a business conglomerate loyal to the Kremlin, though there are still faint traces of the independence it demonstrated in the 1990s and which first brought it to prominence. At the same time, channels tailored to specific audiences have been formed in the last few years, such as Domashnii, which targets primarily housewives and stay-at-home moms, RBK-TV, which is aimed at businesspeople, and STS and TNT which are intended for a younger audience (Kozlov, 2007). There are also multiple niche channels in the growing area of pay TV in Russia. None of these enjoy anything like the resource level of Channel 1 and Rossiia, however. They therefore play little role in the official nation building project, and their potential for involvement in the "banal nationalism" we are interested in here is hampered by their inability to appeal beyond their immediate demographic. Indeed, it is clear that Channel 1 and Rossiia have little understanding of the subtle, subliminal workings of banal nationalism and are much more comfortable peddling the grandiose, gung-ho patriotic machismo favoured by their political masters.

Putin has, however, endeavoured successfully (if popularity ratings are anything to go by) to use his hard-earned power over the national media to forge an image of a militarily strong, self-confident, stable and united Russia. In 2004, for example, he launched *The Star* (*Zvezda*) a channel devoted exclusively to the Russian army. In 2005, a colossal nation-building effort was mounted in parallel with celebrations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory in World War II. The president never missed an opportunity to exploit the resources of television in his attempt to construct a "virtual" freedom in which the surface appearances of democratic culture are replicated in meticulous detail but without the substance and structures of democracy to sustain them. In 2005 Putin appeared on *Vremia* in open-necked, short-sleeved shirt giving an excruciating interview to members of *Nashi* ("Our people"), the supposedly spontaneous youth movement manufactured as a latterday equivalent to the Komsomol, in which he fielded obsequious questions posed with an air of bold informality; this, then, is an "everyday" patriotism which is decidedly not "ordinary."<sup>6</sup>

Channel 1 remains almost entirely subservient to the authoritarian state that pays it, staffs it and determines its broadcasting policies and outputs. Yet to condemn it as such

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<sup>6</sup>Andrew Wilson gives an excellent account of the extent to which this virtualisation process has stymied the development of a democratic culture in post-communist Russia (see Wilson, 2005).

is to ignore the genuine popularity that Putin has enjoyed with an electorate enthused by his success in rescuing Russia from the economic decline for which the oligarchs who had dominated the media were held responsible. It is also to overlook the national identity crisis with which Russians, uniquely among the post-Soviet peoples they had dominated, were confronted. As Hosking (1998) has argued, Russians had perennially conceived of themselves as the centre of a vast multi-ethnic empire and when that empire evaporated in 1991, they were left bereft of a sense of who they were. At the same time, Russia remained a sprawling multicultural state with a weak centre beset by powerful centrifugal forces. When Putin (in)famously declared his faith in the *vertical of power*, his words rang true with many Russians, for whom the related Putinism, *managed democracy*, was less contradictory than for Westerners, and for whom control over the national media was no bad thing. Channel 1 deploys “everyday patriotism” which, rather than grounding itself in the “ordinary,” aims instead to use the recurring cycles of the daily news bulletin to promote heroically positive images of both Putin and Medvedev. This demonstrates that “everyday” is not necessarily synonymous with the “ordinary,” bolstering our rationale for selecting the former rather than the latter as the key term in our title.

Nor did most Russians object when Putin intensified television’s role in the nation building project by pouring vast resources into the commissioning of “patriotic” programming, including a series of made-for-television dramas celebrating the Great Patriotic War and depicting triumphs from pre-revolutionary Russia’s history, and a number of programmes idealising the daily work of Russia’s security forces and Secret Service (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009). The appearance only months after the end of the South Ossetian conflict in late summer 2008 of a glossy television film portraying the “truth” about Georgian atrocities (*Olympius Inferno*, Igor Voloshin, 2009) indicates that the Putin/Medvedev media machine is able to react to events in the much more recent past with alarming rapidity.

More difficult to accommodate within the favoured image of the new Russia is the unabated stream of bad news from the North Caucasus, where an Islamist-inspired separatist movement, together with the anti-Caucasian xenophobic backlash it has helped inspire elsewhere in Russia, ultimately threaten the integrity of the Federation itself. To this day, and despite the swamping of the national television schedules by an ocean of “ordinary television” genres and modes of broadcasting (Russia has now, for example, seen its own versions of *Big Brother*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *Survivor*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *X-Factor*, and many other global formats), there has been little evidence of a concerted effort to foster social cohesion through the “banally nationalistic” creation of realistic, positive images of minority cultures of the sort at which many western broadcasters have been so adept.

Russia, however, is not unique in having to confront the rise of an Islamic militancy exacerbated by inter-ethnic and inter-faith tensions within a multicultural society whose

plurality is swelled by post-colonial migration flows from largely Muslim regions. We devote a forum within our special issue to discussion of a project comparing national television news representations of the daily drip of events connected to the “Islamic threat” in Russia, France and the UK.

The fall of the USSR in 1991 also spelled the disintegration of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, and associated values, which had dominated the media’s articulation of Soviet national identity. With hindsight, the Yeltsin regime’s efforts to erase 70 years from collective memory, and to turn to Russia’s pre-revolutionary past as the ground on which to establish its new, market-led culture, was doomed to failure. Yeltsin’s successors, however, have a no less difficult task. They must retrieve from the detritus of the Soviet past those values, traditions and achievements worth conserving, yet establish the Russian Federation as a major player in the global marketplace and a leading world power, rebuild a sense of pride in past attainments in the face of continued western denigration, yet convey the sense that post-Soviet Russia is a modern, civilized democracy, albeit one with its own “path” through strong statehood (*gosudarstvennichestvo*), and “Eurasianism.” In such circumstances, as we will see in two of our contributions, it is fictional drama and other non-news genres, rather than the more obviously state-led proselytising evident in news and documentary programming, which are best placed to negotiate and ameliorate the tensions and contradictions.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, readers will hardly need reminding that one of the legacies of the Soviet period to have reasserted itself with a vengeance under Putin is strict governmental control over national media output, particularly that of television. Apart from news bulletins which toe the Kremlin line, a consequence of this development has been the squeezing out from the schedules of “serious” investigative journalism by a wave of “talk-shows” (*tok-shou*), game shows, romantic serials, and the like. But, as we have indicated from the beginning, it is within precisely such programming that societal consensuses, shared values, notions of commonsense, moral boundaries and behavioural norms are unconsciously played out. This is much more difficult in a Russia which remains stubbornly non-hegemonic in the Gramscian sense, meaning that power must be more consciously exercised from above; hence Channel 1’s Pavlovian submission to Kremlin diktats, paranoid fear of alternative voices and crude proselytising. A key question to be addressed in an assessment of the role of “ordinary television” in Russian nation building is whether it points to the emergence of a “hegemonic” project whose success would be marked by the degree to which it passes unnoticed. Paradoxically, that success could also lead to the return of “serious” programming. For such programming would, in the new context, ultimately “conform” at

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<sup>7</sup>For more detailed accounts of this process, see Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, and MacFadyen, 2008.

the higher, more subliminal level of the hegemonic consensus. Our special issue makes no claim to answering this question, but we believe that the articles which constitute it go some way towards ensuring that it is correctly posed.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS

We begin with Elena Prokhorova's examination of the use of Soviet-era tropes and iconography in new Russian television series, some locally produced — others remade from globally circulating narratives. Prokhorova suggests that, combined with Putin-era television's propensity for nostalgia, this pattern raises justified concerns over "re-sovietization" of the Russian media. She argues that, despite new serials' frequent reliance on Soviet mythologies, both their narrative function and their consumption by the audiences negotiate between traditional Soviet/local and new capitalist/global meanings and tastes. The article analyzes melodramatic and comic uses of Soviet tropes and topoi in three highly successful serialized productions of the past decade, *The Brigade*, *My Fair Nanny* and *Be Not Born Beautiful*. Using Svetlana Boym's concept of "common places" — stable and shared ideas about the Russian identity — the article discusses representations of the community in transition and the integration of new ideologies of social mobility, private life and personal success with the de-ideologized Soviet "common places."

Next, Stephen Hutchings broaches the need of television news-led nation building projects to frame the traumatic with the everyday, and to map that process onto the ongoing renegotiation of the relationship between the particular and national on one hand, and the transnational and universal on the other. Nowhere is this mapping more vividly revealed, the article suggests, than in national television mediations of 9/11 anniversaries. In their approach to 9/11 anniversaries, broadcasters convey this sense of the threat of an unprecedented, and continuing, danger to the "universal" human values embodied in the nation they represent, whilst "normalising" the situation as part of the fabric of that nation's everyday life, differentiating "our" capacity to cope with, and properly contextualise it, from "their" tendency to ignore, or hyperbolise, its true significance. The article compares Russia's anniversary coverage with that of Britain and France, with which it shares similarities in postcolonial relations with Islamic states and involvement in the "War on Terror," but whose media and political cultures are very different. Hutchings finds that all three channels engage in distinctive instrumentalizations of 9/11 for national purposes. But, he concludes, it is Russian Channel 1 whose abstraction of a universalised, post 9/11 terrorist "evil" renders it most transferable to other contexts, and most potent in terms of its capacity for incorporation into a nation building strategy.

Natalya Rulyova assesses the legacy which late Soviet glasnost has bequeathed to daily news programming in post-Putin Russia. She examines both Channel One news

coverage, and satirical interpretations of that coverage, pointing to the re-emergence of a limited degree of transparency under Dmitrii Medvedev, a factor which might indicate a careful, controlled re-incorporation of glasnost into the official Russian national image. News stories are examined for their newsworthiness, and satirical shows, in terms of the political objects they target. First, a brief historical account of the term “glasnost” is provided so as to establish the framework for the analysis. Then, Rulyova attempts to ascertain the representational modes, discourse and myths used to package Channel One news stories broadcast from October 2009 to January 2010. The article focuses on satirical representations featured in *Thespotlightofparishilton* (*Prozhektorperishilton*) and *The Animated Personality* (*Mul't lichnosti*), two Channel One shows that have appeared since Medvedev's inauguration. These programmes are compared with similar material available on the Russian-language internet, which remains relatively free of state control, and thus provides a point of reference for identifying the boundaries of television glasnost.

In her article, Galina Miazhevich returns us from the politics of the everyday to the aesthetics of the “ordinary,” focusing on post-Soviet Russian appropriations of the annual media event that is Eurovision. She investigates how recent transformations of sexuality displayed at Eurovision and societal attitudes towards it in Russia shape its reconstruction of the boundaries of taste, and how this in turn enables it to reconfigure its own position within the New Europe. She argues that post-Soviet attempts to engage with Eurovision's culture of sexual excess, particularly that of “homosexual camp,” are twofold. On one hand, they involve intracultural dialogue, as the performers mediate between state delineations of the limits of the sexually permissible and popular, grassroots currents within which homosexual “deviance” and excess is openly explored. On the other hand, they can be read in terms of an implicit dialogue with European constructions of “bad taste” and the emergent notion of Euro-trash. Thus, recent Russian Eurovision performances are treated as a “double voiced” act which self-consciously parodies western imaginings of an exotic, yet sexually aberrant, East (hence the inclusion of ethnic “pastiche” alongside sexual excess).

Vera Zvereva presents a study of Russian television programmes about lifestyle and consumption. She focuses on the question of how Russian television of the 2000s constructs images of middle-class everyday life. Zvereva demonstrates that, although the formats of programmes on style and fashion, housing and cooking are international, their Russian variants have their own peculiar features. These are to be found in the key words that recur in them, in their rhetorical systems, in their “discourse of display,” and in the narratives that they feature. A particular attribute of Russian lifestyle and consumption programmes, Zvereva argues, is that they present images of “normal” everyday life which are often absent from television series, documentaries and the news. The majority of the programmes articulate identification strategies aimed at middle class viewers. However, the cultural norms, values and gender roles they contain vary in a great deal. Zvereva concludes by

discussing some key problems arising from the clash of traditional and modern living styles as reflected in the programmes in question.

Finally, Anna Novikova closes the circle traced by the sequence of articles by returning to the theme treated by Prokhorova in our first contribution. She demonstrates how, over the last two decades, Russian television has transformed its interpretation of the Soviet past and re-deployed myths belonging to the Soviet period in order to shape a new identity. Contemporary Russian television, she argues, manipulates “Soviet myths” in order to create the illusion that the social and cultural trauma caused by the fall of the USSR has been overcome. Moreover, television’s pseudo-nostalgia for the Soviet past enables it to distract the audience’s attention from the fact that the new, pro-European Russian identity that had been proclaimed in the 1990s had failed to gel. Russians are once again invited to search for a peculiarly “Russian way” to modernization which draws on the achievements of the USSR, and on the Soviet ideology of social justice cleansed of its Stalinist excesses. Yet, in their everyday culture, Novikova suggests, Russians are portrayed as sharing the benefits and lifestyles of western consumerism standards in Russia. However, this synthesis, she concludes, ultimately collapses into contradiction.

We conclude our special issue with a brief discussion forum based on reflections upon a research project in which the two guest editors were collaboratively involved: a comparative analysis of television news representations of Islam as a security threat in Russia, France and Britain. Bearing in mind the theme of the special issue, we debate in particular the implications of the need for national broadcasters to deal with the cumulative effect of daily reports on terrorist acts carried out by Islamic fundamentalists on national identity projects conceived with the need to foster inter-ethnic cohesion at their core.

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# FLUSHING OUT THE SOVIET: COMMON PLACES, GLOBAL GENRES AND MODERNIZATION IN RUSSIAN TELEVISION SERIAL PRODUCTIONS

ELENA PROKHOROVA

*The widespread use of Soviet-era tropes and iconography remains a constant feature of new Russian television series, both locally produced and remade from globally circulating narratives. Combined with Putin-era television's propensity for nostalgia this pattern raises justified concerns over "re-sovietization" of the Russian media. This article argues that despite new serial shows' frequent reliance on Soviet mythologies, both their narrative function and their consumption by the audiences negotiate between traditional Soviet/local and new capitalist/global meanings and tastes. The article analyzes melodramatic and comic uses of Soviet tropes and topoi in three highly successful serialized productions of the past decade, *The Brigade*, *My Fair Nanny* and *Be Not Born Beautiful*. Using Svetlana Boym's concept of "common places" — stable and shared ideas about the Russian identity, the article discusses representations of the community in transition and the integration of new ideologies of social mobility, private life and personal success with the de-ideologized Soviet "common places."*

**Keywords:** gangster saga, melodrama, sitcom, dramedy, common places, mythologies (Soviet), glamour

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In the introduction to his groundbreaking *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks quotes the narrator of Balzac's *La peau de chagrin*, who follows a simple gesture of a character with a series of questions about its possible meanings. By applying "pressure" to the gesture, the narrator applies "pressure to the surface of reality (the surface of his text)," creating "an exciting, excessive, parabolic story — from the banal stuff of reality" (1995, pp. 1-2). Arguably, there is nothing more "banal," conservative and socially affirming than serialized television narratives. In post-Soviet Russia, television has taken the place of both cinema and literature as the "storyteller." As producer Aleksandr Nazarov (2007) argues: "[t]his is part of the cultural process: the letter to our contemporary must be sent in the language he understands. Millions of people watch (television) serials."

Yet, if we ask ourselves what exactly is being affirmed, what banal (that is, normalized) meanings are conveyed and what role all things Soviet (state ideology, collective identity, nostalgia for the shared past, and specific tropes and iconography) play in contemporary television productions, opinions vary. On the one hand, culture critics and sociologists note the "return of the great style" and the resurgence of the state-centered ideology. On the other hand, they deplore the *embourgeoisment* of the public's taste and the vulgarization of culture via American clones. Both views intersect in the anxiety over the fate of the "passive spectator" who is the victim of the power of the media, and television in particular to shape people's ideas of themselves as individuals and a community.

These "hypodermic needle" fears, partly inherited from Soviet times, partly born out of the justified concern over television offerings, run parallel to the seemingly contradictory anxiety over the apparent *lack* of connection between television narratives and the society they purport to represent. While the imaginary "we" constructed by television is "accepted by 'everyone' and supported, broadcast and reproduced by the most modern mass technologies" there is "a deficit of even minimally culturally coherent narratives about contemporary Russia" (Dubin, 2006). This problem is particularly obvious in the genres that adapt Western genre models, such as sitcom and dramedy, to the post-Soviet reality. Because these genres focus on private life, personal identity and human relations, they must include representation of what Vera Zvereva calls "horizontal links between separate groups and communities" (2006). Zvereva claims that Russian society underestimates "its own multiplicity, the diversity of cultural roles, meanings and discourses which lie at the basis of everyday cultural practices and strategies. Answers to the question 'who are we' is rarely spelled out in the media" (ibid).

Underlying all of these critiques is the idea that the democratic development of Russia has been stumped and the fear that Russian society remains Soviet at heart. There is no doubt that a substantial number of productions, especially those that portray various "enforcement" (aka state security) institutions fit this scenario. As Zvereva (2006) argues, in representing Russian society as a chaotic, dangerous place of undifferentiated victims protected by heroic

cops and special forces, these genres employ Soviet codes to convey the ideology of a paternalistic state, “serious” nostalgia for a safer and simple Soviet past, along with an infusion of the new Russian nationalism.

The picture is different, however, with other genres. This article claims that the use of Soviet cultural codes does not deny either genre diversity or the emergence of new ideologies of capitalist consumption, individual identity and personal success. In fact, it is precisely in negotiating these new ideologies and identities that Soviet tropes acquire meaning and social significance. This negotiation takes place at various levels: generic models, cultural authenticity (Russian vs. “borrowed”), narrative and visual codes; and audience response. The article will look at three successful recent TV projects: *The Brigade* (Brigada, 2002), *My Fair Nanny* (Moia prekrasnaia niania 2004-to date), and *Be Not Born Beautiful* (Ne rodis’ krasivoi, 2005-to date). All three were popular with Russian TV viewers, with ratings in the 30% and appealing to a wide variety of audiences, unlike more targeted soaps or action thrillers. All three productions portray contemporary Russia and belong to the genres originating in post-Soviet culture and/or transplanted into Russian culture from foreign culture industries. *The Brigade* is a gangster saga, which directly quotes its Hollywood prototypes. *My Fair Nanny* is a licensed remake of the CBS sitcom *The Nanny*. *Be Not Born Beautiful* is the Russian version of the globally circulating Columbian “dramedy” *Yo soy Betty, la fea*.

Unlike literary adaptations which are legitimized by their literary sources and often have a stamp of respectability and cultural continuity by employing well-known Soviet-era directors<sup>1</sup>, the three productions discussed here are collective products of the new generation of cultural producers. The implications of this difference are manifold; the one that is central to this discussion is that, by virtue of their age, the makers of these productions might have experienced Soviet life but did not directly participated in Soviet cultural production. Their use of Soviet tropes and iconography, therefore, is more “opportunistic” — dictated by genre and narrative needs — than ideologically motivated.

I contend that the texts examined in this article are searching for a new ideology, however fragmented and vague it is, using Soviet “common places” (Boym, 1995). The vast available material of the “Soviet civilization” is tapped into, exploited and integrated into the narrative but ultimately used to build a new space and new subjectivity. This function of articulation of the collective identity change makes Soviet iconography melodramatically charged, even if it makes its appearance in the form of jokes in a sitcom. In drawing on the Soviet cultural tradition, many productions of the past decade relied on the emotional evocative power of Soviet tropes and sites, “melodramatizing” the re-construction of the

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<sup>1</sup>For example, *The Idiot* (2003) and *Master and Margarita* (2005) was directed by Vladimir Bortko; *The First Circle* (2006) — by Gleb Panfilov.

community of “us” (both as characters and as viewers) as participants in Russia’s capitalist modernization. Both as a genre validated by Russians’ historical tastes and as a mode of representation that carries “the distinct overtones of spiritual crisis” (Elsaesser, 1995, p. 357) — the ability to tap into the subjectivity caught in the shift of values, sensibilities, identifications — melodrama in the new television series ultimately works to legitimize the new culture. In the end, Soviet “common places” are expunged from the narrative or integrated into the new identity as signs of social continuity.

The reason for the general appeal of these productions is twofold. On the one hand, the borrowed genre models and, in the cases of sitcom and dramedy, scripts allowed for tested structures and conventions to be successfully applied to Russian material. While the gangster saga had Russian precursors (e.g., *The Gangster Petersburg/Banditskii Peterburg*; first two parts came out in 2000), the success of *My Fair Nanny* and *Be Not Born Beautiful* owed to the narrative transparency<sup>2</sup> of the model: the storylines are flexible and universal enough to allow native meanings and conflicts to be grafted onto the narrative.

On the other hand, the successful narrative model by itself does not guarantee its smooth transplantation into a different culture, as the modest appeal of *The Balzac Age* (Bal’zakovskii vozrast, 2004-2007; Russian version of *Sex and the City*) suggests. In the case of the sitcom especially, in the short period of “like or hate” the show, the characters and formalized setting have to be read “correctly” in order to make the narrative comprehensible and “our own” (*svoi*). To accomplish this, the shows had to draw on native cultural conflicts and the shared values that could be seen as culturally and morally “authentic.” This moral legibility does not guarantee or even imply viewers’ consensus in reading the show’s “message”; audience responses to these three shows range from moral (and taste-driven) indignation to wholehearted acceptance and praise. Yet any interpretation of these productions that implies a degree of identification (of self or others) with the situations and values in the diegesis suggests that the codes of representation are recognized as native and “typical.” The remainder of this article will examine the interface of Soviet “common places” with genre conventions, character construction, their function in setting and resolving narrative conflict, and audience negotiation of the shows’ constructed realities.

## THE BRIGADE: A FAREWELL TO COMMON PLACES

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<sup>2</sup>Olson (2004, p. 121) argues that the global dominance of Hollywood largely owes to the “narrative transparency” of its films which gives them the ability to be accepted and read in a “native way” (as essentially a different film) in countries that are remote from America culturally and often resent American values.

Aleksei Sidorov's *The Brigade* is unquestionably one of the two most successful and emblematic projects of the early 2000s.<sup>3</sup> Sidorov (b. 1968) wrote the script and made a serial about his own generation's retrospective look at the fall of the Soviet civilization and the violent rise of "wild capitalism" in the 1990s. According to Sidorov, he brought the script to the producers of Avatar-film in 1998, yet because of the financial default the production only started in 2001. Over these four years, the direct experience of the 1990s became a recent memory, and the resulting product is a perfect hybrid. By virtue of their cultural tastes and ambitions<sup>4</sup>, the makers of *The Brigade* see their genre models in Western cinematic traditions. The narrative premise from *Once Upon a Time in America*, quotes from *The Godfather* and *Scarface*, references to *Rambo*, and even the sequence between the Knight and Death from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* look appropriate and at times playfully ironic in the wild, wild east of Russia in the 1990s. Where else can the Russian Michael Corleone have a baptism/slaughter sequence than at a concert of classical music at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory (with the following baptism scene performed quite seriously)? The fetishistic enjoyment of Western consumer products like cars, suits, drinks, and IKEA-style offices is offset by irony too: the chain-smoking heroes refer to Camel cigarettes exclusively as "he-species" (*samets*; this is what the Latin letters "spell" in Cyrillic to gangsters), merging the desire for Western commodities with a sense of Russian cultural — and macho — superiority.

But while Hollywood genre models provide the narrative frame, *The Brigade* is ninety five percent clichés of tried-and-true Soviet tropes that cannot but work as emotional triggers. The family trope, the war trope and the orphan trope are central to the fictional world of *Brigada*. The socio-economic transition from Soviet to post-Soviet is enacted in the private sphere of Sasha Belyi's two families: his nuclear family (mother, wife and son) and the male community of friends-mobsters. The break is embodied in the losses — of childhood, friendship, first love, and the sense of belonging to a community. The narrative jump from 1989 to 1991 is the only meaningful one in the series, both in nostalgically marking the departing Soviet experience and in omitting the mechanisms of the transformation of a demobilized soldier, a prospective student, a good son and friend Sasha Belov to Belyi — Mr. White — the ruthless leader of a crime family.

Compounding the jarring moral discontinuity is the bare-bones dialogue of the serial, oscillating between criminal jargon, "business talk" and emotional outbursts, largely conveyed through pacing, drinking, chain smoking and physical violence. As befits

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<sup>3</sup>The other one is the television adaptation of Fedor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (2003). For an excellent discussion of the use of melodramatic codes and the show's populist appeal, see Kliuotchkine, 2005.

<sup>4</sup>According to Sidorov, "The idea of *The Brigade*... claimed to present the global scope of events" (Sidorov, 2003)

melodrama, *Brigade* talks more through its iconography and violent action. In the tradition of Aleksei Balabanov's Danila Bagrov, the main characters of *The Brigade* are language-deficient, a device which endows even the most banal remarks with metaphorical power, as when Sasha tells his wife Olia in the intimacy of the family bed: "It is a strange life, life run amuck (*beshenaia*), like in the Mesozoic era. And there is this sea of money, oceans of money." This muteness is a perfect vehicle for the "unspeakable" social and moral break. Instead, violence becomes the language dramatizing "the desire of melodrama to express all" (Brooks, 1995, p. 4), and the private space of family and friendship is invaded and destroyed by the forces of social change. The myth-bearing Soviet sites and tropes, mostly in their Thaw-era iterations, fulfill their melodramatic functions, and are then destroyed as not viable in the new culture.

Sasha's apartment in a "sleeper district" (*spal'nyi raion*) on the outskirts of Moscow is the site where several tropes are re-enacted: soldier coming back to his mother from the war, the girl who did not "wait for him" and the three friends (Cosmos, Phil and Pchela) who are his only community now. The space of Soviet childhood and innocence is violated by the corrupt cops who search the apartment and plant a gun; its safety destroyed as Sasha's mother, wife, and child watch in terror an attempt on Sasha's life. The death of the mother, archetypally sacrificial and devoted to her son, from heart failure, and Sasha's return to the family apartment to plea for forgiveness, marks the disjuncture between the idealized Soviet and new Russian values.

The country house (*dacha*) where Sasha is hiding from the police is another site of lost innocence. On the one hand, this is where Sasha meets his future wife Olia, a violin student at the Chaikovsky conservatory. While Sasha's courtship methods are problematic — he uses a telescope<sup>5</sup> at the *dacha* to spy on Olia and then stalks her on the way to Moscow — the scenario of their relationship replays the "worker and intellectual" plot of *The Spring on Zarechnaia Street* (*Vesna na Zarechnoi ulitse*, dirs. Marlen Khutsiev and Feliks Mironer, 1956). In the evening Sasha's friends come over with girls and alcohol and party well into the night, while Olia listens to the sounds of the orgy. But *The Brigade*'s rather effective strategy of dealing with the highly questionably morality of its central characters is to present their actions as "wrapped" in the validating (and mythologizing) Soviet tropes and juxtapose it to the "real" violence, lawlessness and corruption of the new Russia. Here anything goes, not because morality is compromised but because the show sets out to capture the *feeling* of the end of an era, not its reality.

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<sup>5</sup>The telescope is symbolically linked to the name of Sasha's closest friend, Cosmos. While the name is motivated by the profession of Cosmos' father (he is a professor of astrophysics), it also evokes the 1950s-60s Soviet mythology of space exploration. This mythology combined the idea of progress with the social and political optimism of Khrushchev era.

When special forces arrive and wreak havoc, spraying the country house with bullets and wounding Sasha, this excessive and “unjust” violence makes the sexual escapades look like youthful indiscretion which, moreover, is part of the mythology of the *dacha* in the first place. This violent destruction of the *dacha* is the defining moment in Sasha’s fate: even though Cosmos’s academic father uses his connections to get the charges against Sasha dropped, for the four friends the world has forever changed. The last image of that past is the oath on the Vorob’ev Hills — a reference to the famous oath of Aleksandr Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev 1827, which became a symbol of a great friendship dedicated to the fight for “the freedom of the Russian people.” The seeming misappropriation of this canonized moment in the Russian liberation movement is in fact culturally precise: Herzen’s critique of the corrupt Russian government and his support of individual rights resonate both with Sasha’s personal predicament (he is forced into hiding/exile by a corrupt cop) and with Russia’s new, violent spiral of modernization.

The narrative begins with Sasha’s return from the Afghan war, which in the series is the space of brotherhood and a nostalgic memory, a space of innocence and clarity compared to the 1990s. The war trope is the organizing structure of the narrative. It redefines Sasha’s friends as the “Brigade” but also provides an emotionally-charged parallel to the trench war brotherhood; it justifies the ruthlessness of the crime wars and supplies the requisite moral polarization in a world that has lost its traditional reference points. The threat to the brotherhood — from violence or from betrayal — is the narrative of male melodrama. Sasha’s army buddy Farkhad becomes a leader of the Tadjik drug cartel, and war brotherhood proves stronger than the mutual suspicion of two gangs. Farkhad ultimately falls victim to the corrupt cop Kaverin, and he is killed on the Ferris wheel in Gorky Park, one of the beloved cinematic Moscow sites. Here, as elsewhere, Soviet references are used as shortcuts to the coded emotionality, but are quickly abandoned for a new cinematic attraction: the concert-slaughter revenge for the friend’s death.

The war-ripped, polarized space of Moscow becomes a welcoming site for another central trope of Thaw culture: the orphan trope. Social and cultural breaks separate Sasha and his friends from their nuclear families, while crime and corruption rupture any meaningful link to the broader community. The reconfigured small family of the criminal brotherhood replaces both; yet its “bonding mechanisms” are so morally problematic that they are reevaluated by the performance of Soviet common places. Sasha and Olia’s wedding is a traditional Russian party (*zastol’e*), where Soviet-era communality is enacted by the “brothers-in-crime.” Sasha’s friends perform the song from *The Wild Pack* (better known in Russia as *Sandpit Generals*/General’ peschanykh kar’erov, dir. Hall Bartlett, 1971).<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup>After the film’s release in USSR in 1974, the song was translated into Russian. It was performed by official Soviet singers but quickly became a standard fair of amateur singers at communal gatherings.



film's theme of homeless children who organize gangs because they are abandoned by society, and the brooding melancholy tune of the song resonates with *The Brigade's* heroes' "orphan" status and anticipates the hopelessness of their "war." When after the party Sasha and Olia approach their new apartment in the "building of Kotelnicheskaya embankment,"<sup>7</sup> (a wedding present from Sasha's friends), a planted bomb almost kills the newlyweds.

On the narrative level then, *The Brigade* is motivated exclusively by national mythologies and melodramatic logic. Neither socio-political context (with the exception of the Chechen War) nor psychological motivation plays any role in the serial, beyond underscoring the clash between the public and the private. The jarring — but strategically timed — discontinuities and coincidences are striking. For instance, the famous signal of the 1991 coup — the broadcasting of *Swan Lake* on all television channels — finds Sasha and Olia in the family bed at the end of an episode; yet the next episode begins with no mention of the event. The 1993 bloody storming of the White House happens as Sasha is rushing to the hospital where Olia is giving birth. He and his friends are detained and thrown in jail. But apart from the emotional intercutting between Olia's delivery and the jail cell, the event has no meaning.

As in *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, a 1970s serial which also masks its melodramatic nature underneath spy/war conventions, period markers in *The Brigade* provide a sense of authenticity to the emerging myth of the 1990s but have no narrative value. By bracketing the political reality, *Brigade* achieves perfect melodramatic structure. The tough mobsters are ultimately puppets in the hands of largely invisible Gods (the government and the KGB/FSB) who are beyond good and evil. Sasha's FSB handler who makes him take on morally objectionable business deals (redirecting drug trafficking from Europe to Russia; selling weapons to Chechen rebels to provoke a war) is never himself judged.

In the Mesozoic forest of 1990s Moscow the preservation of the brotherhood family, threatened by violence and betrayal, is the only means of survival. The bonds of the brotherhood are measured against the iconic sequence from the first episode of the friends joy-riding in a Lincoln car. Closer to the end of the series, after leaving a casino, the Brigade separates: instead of getting into Sasha's car, Pchela rides with his partners from the Caucasus. The violence of the following sequence — the car with three friends exploding in central Moscow, across from the White House — is also emotionally coded: Pchela is the obvious suspect of the crime. Before the explosion, the friends notice arrows on their expensive watches going in circles: time "running amock." At the hospital, Sasha and

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<sup>7</sup>The building is one of the "seven sisters," the late Stalinist project executed in the Gothic style which until the post-Soviet construction boom defined Moscow's cityscape. Living in such an elite building was a sign of high status. This building became a cinematic landmark in Soviet cinema from the 1950s (*Loyal Friends /Vernye друз'ia*, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov 1954) through the 1980s (*Pokrovsky Gates/Pokrovskie vorota*, dir. Mikhail Kazakov 1982).

Cosmos face Phil's almost certain death from head trauma and the possibility of Pchela's betrayal. Before they execute him, however, the serial enacts another commonplace, that of blood brotherhood: Pchela's blood is pumped into Phil. Judas' life is extended by a few hours, enough for a miracle to occur: the true murderer identified from a video tape is a gay movie producer who owed Phil money.

It is significant that money and its power, however central both are to the world of *The Brigade*, are marginal in the life-or-death, good-or-evil extremes of the serial. The true villains Kaverin and Max are both former policemen, whose hatred of Sasha and his friends might have a personal basis (both lost their jobs thank to the lawlessness of unchecked capitalism) but which rises to a symbolic level. The corrupt cop Kaverin is both Sasha's nemesis, who planted the gun and thus "determined" Sasha's fate, and Sasha's double, the ultimate shape-shifter, both the agent and the victim of the new era of Russia's modernization.

After wallowing in the hallowed clichés of a "collective past," *The Brigade* neatly ties narrative knots and, in a big tragic finale, flushes the entire 1990s down. The slaughter of all three of Sasha's friends in five minutes at the point of Sasha's victory in the elections is effective, quick and largely invisible. All four have their throats cut by Max, making it "personal" in a film where guns of all calibers are treated as fetishistic objects. In a last tribute to melodramatic logic, the gruesomeness and action are underplayed in favor of mourning. The last act of the Russian melodrama is the funeral ritual: Sasha paying his last respects to his friends and placing guns into their coffins. As Helena Goscilo argues, gang culture of the 1990s "enacted gestures of national funeral melodrama" (2002, p. 311). The grand spectacle of the funeral of the "fallen brothers" drew on the tradition of venerating the hero, usually an intelligentsia hero, with lamentation, post-mortem glorification and instant mythologization of the deceased.

The true Russian drama ends with the loss of the Soviet friends. The scenes that follow — Sasha's staging of his own death, his revenge on Kaverin and Max, and the departure to America of his wife and child — belong to a different culture and enact different conventions. Sasha's revenge on Kaverin and Max is performed in the style of Steven Seagal/Walker Texas Ranger, as a morally satisfying but kitschy display of macho justice. The scene at the airport is the Russian answer to *The Godfather*: providing a morally "right" closure but lacking the drama which has been drained by the destruction of the "male family."

Controversy over *The Brigade* predictably focused on its romanticizing of the gangster culture. Those who strongly criticized the serial argued that it provided a dangerous model for boys and that it paraded a "confused" post-Soviet morality (are they heroes or villains?). Some viewers complained of the lack of originality, by which they meant exploiting Hollywood clichés but not Soviet visual and narrative tropes. But it was precisely those native "common places" that were responsible for the production's excess and that triggered

a strong response from audiences. Comments like the following abound: “The film is soulfully made; it has everything: romanticism, love, blood and tears”; “Interestingly, one feels for the heroes without condoning them”; “I’ve never taken a film to heart before, but this is what happened with *The Brigade*. I was crying my eyes out! I would remember the film and bawl again!” The responses came not only from Russian audiences but also from those in other CIS countries, the Baltic States and half of Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> A Russian melodrama cum gangster saga, *The Brigade* for a moment reunited the fragmented Soviet space, before bidding farewell to the common places of the socialist past.

### PRIVATE IN PLAIN SIGHT: MY FAIR NANNY AND THE ISSUE OF “POSHLOST”

In contrast to the vast opportunities for emotionally coded mise-en-scène supplied by the genre and the budget of *The Brigade*, sitcom and “dramedy” rely on a different aesthetic. Sitcoms in particular are shot to look theatrical, with a very limited number of locations, the look of which is designed to produce an impression of continuity and “realism” that is, to look “typical.” Camera movement functions to maximize the effect of jokes or set up comic situations. In this sense the diegesis of a sitcom is only skin deep if considered in cinematic terms.

Yet, the sitcom’s relationship to the audience is a complex one: “[t]o share humor with someone we need to share a form of life with him [sic]” (Morreall, 1983, p. 61). If the 2003 adaptation of *The Idiot*, as Klioutchkine argues, became a training ground for Russians in “relationship talk” *My Fair Nanny* (MFN) introduced Russian audiences to an extensive representation of everyday, private life. As Svetlana Boym argues, “[t]he war against the reification and objectification of pleasures and experiences of life” has been one of the enduring features of the Russian intellectual tradition (1995, p. 38). The privileging of *bytie* (spiritual being) over *byt* (everyday routine and stagnation” (ibid, 29) made the sphere of everyday experiences and private pleasure a target of attacks by critics, from 19<sup>th</sup>-century radicals to Soviet-era intellectuals. It is the rehabilitation of personal dreams, pursuits and experiences that made “nanny Vika” both an easy target of attacks and a democratic figure of shared experiences.

This shared life is what expands the diegesis of *MFN* and invests its basic sets with symbolic power. For comedy to work, it has to “disrupt expectations and norms; but to do so, especially in a narrative form such as the sitcom, it has to also present those norms, so

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<sup>8</sup>Forum, *The Brigada* (n.d.). Retrieved 12 June, 2010 from <http://ruskino.ru/mov/forum/9>; IMDb users’ review, the *Brigada* (n.d.) Retrieved 12 June, 2010 from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337898/usercomments>.

that there is something to disrupt” (Goddard, 1991, p.80). If viewers in Russia found *MFN* funny, in stark contrast to previous failed sitcoms, it was because they found its premise to be both familiar (the encounter between “haves,” be it aristocracy, intelligentsia or new Russians, and “have-nots”) and pleasurably subverted.

Vika Prutkovskaia’s appearance in the house of musical producer Maxim Shatalin enacts this encounter with the socially privileged. She is doubly marginal — her substandard Russian peppered with Ukrainian phrases combined with the provincial qualities of a simple girl from Biriulevo — and out of place in a condo “a walking distance from the Kremlin.” But Vika’s marginality and pre-Shatalin life is constructed less in terms of ethnic, class and cultural background (as in the American sitcom) and more as recollections of an experience from a different historical era. Instead of the “display of excessive Jewishness” (Mills, 2005, p.127) in the American show, Vika and especially her mother display excessive “Soviet-ness” and whereas Shatalin’s lifestyle is a consumer dream, Vika’s is typical, its normalcy disguised by the identity displacement. As with Nikolai Gogol’s “Ukrainian tales”<sup>9</sup> the choice of the Ukrainian nanny is an estrangement device that facilitates the representation of the real cultural clash: the Soviet “tribal” identity and the new individual(istic) one. That this encounter is enacted in everyday, private and comic situations is quite revolutionary. Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova argue that

“the key to *MFN*’s success is its position at the metathreshold of text and audience, a threshold onto which the tensions afflicting post-Soviet culture are transferred. Vika’s (un)popularity is a function of her role as an emblem of television culture in its negative connotations (*MFN* as the ultimate in American-inspired vulgarity) and its positive manifestation (*MFN* as the epitome of the earthy authenticity of the provincial parvenue)” (2009, p. 158).

Shatalin’s two-floor condo downtown and Vika’s 40-square-meter Soviet apartment in Biriulevo exist in different dimensions that are separated not so much by the miles of the sprawling metropolis as by the time shift from the Soviet past to the post-Soviet present. Vika’s family living room is almost a parody of the Soviet life style: a couch with a broken spring, wallpaper of indefinite color and design, lace-trimmed napkins decorating all surfaces in the room. Vika’s mother, brilliantly performed by Liubov’ Polishchuk, is an extension of this Soviet space, her good natured meddling into others’ affairs — a comical

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<sup>9</sup>Gogol’s *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1831-32), his first successful collection of stories, is set in a pseudo-Ukrainian village populated by colorful peasants, witches and the devil himself. A romantic writer, Gogol mystified his audiences by disguising his highly original tales as “Ukrainian folklore.”

take on the old Soviet communality. Artifacts from the Soviet past — objects, songs, stories, people — evince a smile of recognition with no judgment, like a moth-eaten arctic fox fur coat bequeathed to Vika: the coat “smells like granny Valia: ‘Red Moscow’ perfume and little cutlets.”

Vika’s and Maxim’s extended families represent two different civilizations as well. Maxim has one sister who lives in Vilnius and is about to marry a Lithuanian baron. Vika has dozens of relatives all over Russia and Ukraine, who constantly get married, die, fight, and invade Shatalin’s orderly home, temporarily turning it into a communal apartment. This is a joyful carnival, a comical enactment of the revolution and a celebration of “people-mindedness”; but it also forces recognition of a historical shift. Even when that other Russia is not present on screen, it emerges out of Vika’s memories and the many stories she tells to the Shatalins. These stories and references, usually recalling the 1980s, are not nostalgic (one of the beneficial features of the sitcom genre is its allergy to nostalgia) and present Vika in a comical light. But she is also the only character who bridges the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present and the only connection of the series to the world outside the diegesis: Shatalin, his acquaintances and guests are pods who act in accordance with genre rules.

As in its American prototype, nanny Vika’s spontaneity, loudness and unwanted initiatives are presented as naïve and disruptive of the established rituals of the bourgeois household. But when *The Nanny* pokes fun at the father’s stiffness and misconceptions about his children’s upbringing, and at his business assistant’s pretentiousness, the comic situations draw on the dominant assumptions about particular groups and types of characters. *My Fair Nanny*, in contrast, pitches Vika against a bourgeois environment that is so new as to preclude any reading of it as “the norm.” In a group study of Russian viewer preferences conducted in 2008, while participants were ready to accept a certain degree of conventionality and “fairy-tale” if it gave them an emotional and positive experience, they had problem imagining a “middle-class Russian who became affluent through honest labor.” That was deemed as lacking realism, or at least not “typical” enough (Bogoslavskaja & Solntseva, 2008). Shatalin’s and his assistant Zhanna’s high-society manners cannot be understood as anything other than the snobbery of social upstarts — precisely what Vika is cast as. Vika, however, is fully aware of her identity and secure in her style, and her repeated breaking of the codes of bourgeois propriety exposes her employers more often than it makes fun of her.

Vika’s position in between the two worlds motivates her two roles in the series: she is both a trickster who exposes new Russian bourgeois vanity and “inauthenticity” and a figure representing a melodramatic break with the past. In most episodes that reconcile the “tribal” Soviet past and the individualist present the dominant mode is humor resulting from Vika’s carnivalizing the “proper” event. Other episodes, however, reveal Vika’s precarious existence in the world of the rich: from a trickster she transforms into a victim. Whereas as a trickster Vika subverts claims that she “does not belong” by using her everyday wisdom

to infuse life into a bourgeois ritual, as a victim she is powerless and her past catches up with her.

The episode “Good Old Times” illustrates this metamorphosis. The episode begins at Vika’s old apartment, where her mother is cleaning Vika’s closet. Shatalin’s children participate in the parade of clothes, shoes and pictures from the “past,” accompanied by Vika’s reminiscences of standing in line to buy high heels. By the time it was her turn, only a mismatched pair of a red and a yellow pump was left, but Vika was the queen of the Soviet-era *diskoteka*. With this mild nostalgia tempered by humor (e.g., Vika teaches Shatalin’s daughter Masha to walk on four-inch heels by wearing flared pants to hide dislocated ankles), the episode switches gears to the more uncertain present. Shatalin’s children ask Fedor Bondarchuk Jr. to be Vika’s date for her high school reunion. Even though her entrance lacks respectability — the couple rides a motorcycle — Vika becomes queen for a day among her former classmates, reliving the glory of the happy “old days.” But two minutes into her triumph of successful integration into the new Russian life, Bondarchuk informs Vika that he has another appointment and leaves. For that lonely moment, before Shatalin shows up to “rescue” her and dance to “Bahama Mama,” Vika finds herself vulnerable and unable to escape the predicament of marginality. The sitcom, however, gives melodramatic coincidence a positive spin and avoids sentimentality through its structure: the memory of being hurt, like any other memory, is not renewable from one episode to the next.

The comedic and melodramatic modalities that coexist in *MFN* give it more cultural authenticity than could be expected from a “transplanted” sitcom. Underneath the funny side of the cultural clash there runs the unspoken (and quickly diverted) but clear experience of emotional crisis and social trauma. It is not surprising then that, as Hutchings and Rulyova point out, audiences were confused for some time over the show’s genre. “Most respondents to the web forums referred to it as a ‘*serial*’ (serial), assuming that the narrative situation would eventually be resolved through Vika’s marriage to Shatalin” (2009, p. 151). This is exactly what happens in season six; the comments, however, suggest more than inexperience with the conventions of a sitcom. Rather they betray a profound anxiety over and identification with Vika’s “funny” predicament of being so close to the new Russian dream but constantly thwarted from achieving it. Female respondents repeatedly mused about “meeting a man like Shatalin” and being rescued from the vagaries of being outsiders in the post-Soviet reality (ibid, p. 146). Inserted in the playing field of a contemporary sitcom, the traditional Cinderella motif retains its power. And while the dream of “meeting a man like Shatalin” as the symbol of integration into capitalism obviously reinforces patriarchal structure, equally important is the implied acceptance of Vika, *just as she is*, as the new Russian woman and the mother to “new Russian” children.

Nowhere is this layered nature of *MFN* and its touching on the sore spots of Russian identity more visible than in the re-emergence of the discourse of *poshlost*’ in viewers’ and critics’ responses to the show. Hutchings’ and Rulyova’s summary of viewer responses

indicate complex identification mechanisms at work: “Vika as a cipher for the materialistic shallowness and vulgarity of her fans; Vika’s *poshlost*’ as part of her ‘honest, down-to-earth approach to life’ (vs. the elitism and snobbery of her detractors); *MFN* as a satire on shallow-minded post-Soviet materialism” (ibid, pp. 153-154). Vika’s Ukrainian accent, garish clothes, loud voice and provincial manners, her aggressive sexuality and earthy humor, and especially her “low-class” interests and her obsession with finding a rich husband made her an easy target. At the same time, the (non)-recognition of self and others in Vika legitimizes the everyday, the “banal” as a part of the discourse about Russian identity.

Discussing the evolution of the discourse of *poshlost*’, Svetlana Boym points out its links to the pace of Russia’s modernization from 19<sup>th</sup> century on which blurred the familiar clear divide between the “old” and the “new”:

“The ‘past’ is limited to the ‘old,’ to the most immediate history being negated by the ‘new.’ The evil of “poshlost’,” for some Russian cultural critics, consists precisely in its fuzziness: poshlost’ refers to a whole variety of “impure” phenomena such as the mixed and eclectic low-brow urban culture — neither the aristocracy-intelligentsia nor the people — and in fact it jeopardizes the clear contrast between the two and threatens the intellectual’s idealization of the people’s culture and its national purity” (1995, pp. 46-47).

Russia’s new encounter with capitalism, the revaluation of what matters<sup>10</sup> and the increased social and spatial mobility, produced a crisis of value, confusing the inherited knowledge about “the relative positioning of individuals, populations, and lifestyles along a civilizational scale of value and power” (Patino, 2005, p. 490). As a social climber and a person of everyday wisdom, Vika in this sense is a figure of democratization, the celebration of the private and the everyday. In a way, her only “handicap” is her comedic, unmelodramatic way of attaining access to personal happiness and material prosperity.

## ***BE NOT BORN BEAUTIFUL: MELODRAMATIC MASQUERADE***

The Russian version of *Betty la fea* fully satisfied the cultural preference for the heroine’s melodramatic integration into the new corporate culture. The “dramedy” *Be Not Born Beautiful* (2005) is a continuous, 200-episode story of the transformation of an “ugly” girl from a good Soviet family into a glamorous and legitimate member of the Russian business elite — and a reciprocal re-education of a shallow new Russian man. The setting of the fashion industry accorded quite well with the peak of Russia’s obsession with the

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<sup>10</sup>For a study of Russians’ experiences with marketization and discourses about social and moral values in post-Soviet society, see Patino (2005).

trappings of *glamur* (glamour) which temporarily occupied the place of national ideology.<sup>11</sup> But the discourse of appearances at the expense of social issues<sup>12</sup> is also a fitting frame for the serial's treatment of its major social conflict of transition from traditional (Soviet) to modernized (corporate Russian) values and culture. *Be Not Born Beautiful* resolves this problem by staging a masquerade of identities: good Soviet values, located in the family and the collective are injected into the story otherwise driven by the post-Soviet ideology of personal success, and Soviet tropes and sites function as conventional genre devices.

On its face, the plot revolves around the conflict between Katia Pushkareva's values that stem from her still-Soviet family and supported by the collectivity of the *zhensovet* — a group of secretaries at Zimaletto, and the egotistical, mercantile but desirably modern world of corporate culture and the fashion industry. The corporate culture of the new "office Russia" is the space of sitcom; Katia's integration into this world is the space of melodrama. Soviet cinematic tradition provides a comfortable frame of reference for viewers: *Office Romance* (dir. El'dar Riazanov, 1977) — for an updated version of intrigues and drama at a workplace; *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (dir. Vladimir Men'shov, 1979) — for a modern Cinderella story.

*Be Not Born Beautiful* revels in the sites of new Moscow showcasing its "Western" appearance: offices, condos, fashionable restaurants, clubs and fashion shows. Yet the few "Soviet spaces" here are used for their full emotional and symbolic potential. In contrast to the comedic use of Vika's family apartment and the over-the-top acting of her mother, *Be Not Born Beautiful* accentuates the warmth, communality and modest comfort of the Soviet household, modeling it on the collective memory of the Brezhnev stagnation. The spaces chosen for extensive representation are the kitchen — the heart of the Soviet apartment — and Katia's room. As Katia's personal space and an indicator of her transitional identity, the room combines traditional features (an old couch, bookshelf, plush animals) with a computer, a cell phone and business files. Next to the traditional carpet on the wall are two posters: the famous picture of Albert Einstein sticking out his tongue and a poster of John Lennon. While these images belong neither to the past nor the present, they signify positively marked Western culture as spiritual "civilization" as opposed to the superficial materialist consumerism.

The Soviet-looking yard next to the apartment building also plays the melodramatic role of a threshold. Most shots of the yard are taken at night, in contrast to the evenly and

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<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of various instantiations of the Russian glamour culture of the Putin era, see a special issue of *Kultura* 6 (December 2008): "Glamorous Russia," guest editors Larissa Rudova and Birgit Menzel.

<sup>12</sup>While the American *Ugly Betty*, for example, devotes significant space to the issue of illegal immigration via the figure of the vulnerable Latino man, the Russian version eschews social and economic problems.



brightly lit Zimaletto offices. The yard is equipped with a bench, where a group of Katia's former schoolmates mock the "ugly" girl. These guys are neither Soviet-era hoodlums with a guitar and a bottle of vodka, nor a post-Soviet gang. Rather they represent Katia's past as an "ugly duckling" and, like the yard itself, are instrumental in signaling her transformation: the last episode returns to them staring in disbelief, as Katia is getting into a fairy-tale limousine which will take her to her wedding. The yard is also the space where Katia is defended by the two men in her life: her father and her boss/man of her dreams, Andrei Zhdanov. Unlike the spaces of stable identity, Katia's family apartment and Zimaletto offices, both of which constantly challenge male domination — the yard allows the men to enact patriarchy unhindered.

As a heroine of a *telenovela*, Katia seems to embody what Jesus Martin Barbero calls "the ignorance of an identity" (1995, p. 277), the need to be recognized by other *despite* the depreciation of values by commercial culture. Within this logic, Katia's "ugliness" and her implied "right values" are intrinsically linked; her success and transformation into a beauty — becoming visible — will allow her inner goodness to be recognized. What is peculiar about *Be Not Born Beautiful* is that Katia's exaggerated "Soviet" appearance is nothing more than a masquerade costume for what is already a full-fledged post-Soviet identity, as the show sees it. Katia is a business wiz, a practical and sober girl. Unlike her friends from the *zhensovet*, she does not need a community to share her secrets or to cry on a friend's shoulder. Even in her marginal position at Zimaletto she has agency: not only is she *de facto* owner of the company which is mortgaged to Katia's NikaModa, but Katia's opponents at the company rightfully suspect that she has a lot of influence on Andrei even with her "ugly" appearance. Moreover, she is sexually liberated; even if her intimate experiences are negative they are treated as neither morally compromising nor emotionally "scarring." In fact, Katia does not think twice before having sex with Andrei who is engaged to another woman. Katia's only problems then are her "unglamorous" appearance and, of course, her "irrational" love for the womanizer Andrei Zhdanov.

Casting decisions, while using Soviet cinematic material for easily identifiable references, are often quite insightful. For instance, Andrei's father, the creator of Zimaletto, is played by Georgii Taratorkin, an actor of the Mossovet Theater. Among his cinematic roles perhaps the most famous is the role of Rodion Raskolnikov in the 1969 Soviet adaptation of *Crime and Punishment*. While the choice of Taratorkin was no doubt motivated by his well-aged, intellectual and "Western" appearance, his capitalist entrepreneurial present is a curious comment on Raskolnikov's "theory." Irina Murav'eva who plays Katia's mother appeared in the Oscar-winning late Soviet blockbuster *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, in the role of a materialistic provincial girl who comes to Moscow in search of a rich husband. Her character in *Be Not Born Beautiful* is the reversal of the Soviet-era role. As Katia's mother, she represents traditional late Soviet values: strong family, education and moral upbringing. Like other actors of the older generation, Murav'eva is a figure of

continuity with the Soviet cinematic tradition but exclusively on the genre level: in the new version of the ever-popular Cinderella story “Soviet values” are just a convenient narrative device to flesh out the conflict.

The show offers two versions of integrating the traditional Soviet into the modernized post-Soviet values and culture. One is melodramatic, focusing on the unequal relationship between Katia and her boss. The most melodramatically charged scenes are Andrei’s make-out sessions with Katia. Unlike the girl, the viewer is well aware that Andrei’s true motive for seducing Katia is to prevent her from “hijacking” the company from him. A dozen episodes alternate between the painful scenes of intimacy in an SUV parked in the yard next to Katia’s house, and Andrei’s and his manager Roman’s cynically plotting the details of seduction. These discussions always take place in “new Russian” spaces: Zimaletto offices, restaurants, clubs. Moral polarization and the setting play important roles here to signal Katia’s victimization as part of her (still) marginal position in the new corporate culture. The narrative strongly relies on coincidence and mistiming<sup>13</sup>: Katia is seduced and used by Andrei in *exactly the same way* as she was used by a male student at the institute; Andrei sets the seduction plan in motion *just* as Katia falls in love with him; Katia finds the instructions *just* as Andrei starts feeling pangs of conscience.

By the time Andrei falls in love with (the still ugly) Katia, she begins to play games with him. This is the difference between Katia’s actions and the expected behavior of a Russian or Soviet damsel in distress upon discovering treason. A Russian victimized heroine would kill herself; a Soviet one would find solace in work and the community until a modest but reliable man appears. The post-Soviet Katia does neither. Instead she plans the perfect revenge: after both a personal *and* a financial retribution, she gets a make-over and then waits for the man of her dreams to come around. By disclosing Andrei’s financial machinations to his father and other members of the Board of Directors, she undermines her beloved’s career as payback for his emotional abuse.

Another melodramatic device is Katia’s diary. Throughout her affair with Andrei, Katia never talks about it with anyone. Instead she hides in her room or her closet-office in Zimaletto at night, sharing her most intimate feelings with the diary and, through the voice-over, with the audience. The diary becomes both a narrative motivation and a melodramatic object. What makes the diary such an efficient emotional trigger is its association with the more traditional, pre-computer culture. If the images of Einstein and Lennon in Katia’s room suggest Western civilization, the hand-written diary invokes an entire Russian cultural lineage, from aristocratic ladies to Soviet girls. As culturally validated object, the diary is a positive indicator of Katia’s sincerity and decency. But it is also true that the dark secrets, the pain, the self-analysis written in desperate loneliness have no place in the brightly lit,

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<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of these melodramatic devices, see Doane (1990).

glamorous consumer paradise. The diary's privacy must be invaded, and later in the show Katia's mother and Andrei Zhdanov separately read the diary. By that time Katia's transformation into a beauty is complete, the "evil spell" of the old identity is lifted, and the masquerade is over.

The comedic integration is primarily represented via Katia's father, a retired army colonel. His forays into Zimaletto, his outrage at the lack of military discipline in the employees, and his shock from encounters with the vain designer Milko and his "non-traditional sexual orientation" underscore the contrast between the two cultures. But the meeting of the rough and awkward Pushkarev Sr. with the sleek capitalist Zhdanov Sr. reconciles things: after all, the two patriarchs with the shared Soviet past can trust each other.

The trope of collectivism comes in handy when Katia's family helps young chef Misha to open his first restaurant. When capitalist sponsorship falls through, it is the communal work at a socialist *subbotnik* that saves the day. Pushkarev Sr. summons his old army buddies to work for free as waiters. Initially they seem incompatible with the new consumer environment: they serve food in the "Soviet style"; the uniforms designed for standard and well-groomed waiters do not fit the overweight and colorful group. Their "training" by Misha is a series of comedic gags, which ultimately produces a successful combination of new professionalism and old-style charm.

Finally, Katia's and Andrei's reconciliation is staged in a perfect fusion of the melodramatic and the ironic use of Soviet material. The glamorous "Soviet girl" and the fallen from grace new Russian man meet in the production department of Zimaletto where Andrei undergoes his personal and professional "re-education." With the "Marseillaise" playing in the background and a crowd of female workers who beg their beloved leaders not to leave the company, Andrei and Katia finally kiss to collective cheering.

The comforting illusion of moral and cultural continuity with the Soviet past, conveyed through melodramatic excess, comical clashes, and the Cinderella-type social justice pleased the audiences of *Be Not Born Beautiful*. The most common descriptive word used in the comments is "kind": "this is a kind serial, it has no violence and even tragic moments are treated with humor."<sup>14</sup> The feel-good narrative proved a worthy heir to the still beloved "lyrical comedies" of the 1970s. Nevertheless, the responses also reveal the splintering of audiences and the shift in cultural tastes triggered both by the effect of "parallel existence" alongside characters for two hundred days, and the familiarity with both Soviet models of the genre and other versions of *Betty la Fea* (in particular, the Colombian and the American ones). For many younger viewers, not only was the melodramatic plot the weakest part of the serial, but it was also "false" and morally confused, as opposed to the

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<sup>14</sup>Forum (n.d.), *Be Not Born Beautiful*. Retrieved 26 May, 2010, from <http://www.ruskino.ru/mov/forum/4559>.

comedic elements which managed to capture contemporary types. Moreover, the viewers saw right through Katia's dramatic "transformation" as a mere change of "mask."

## CONCLUSION

Post-Soviet society and culture continue to exist in a state of transition. Putin's presidency saw an increase in nationalistic rhetoric in the media, accompanied by attempts at rehabilitating Soviet history and the return to Soviet narrative and visual codes. But equally conspicuous are the changes in the Russian media and audience tastes. As the examination of three television hit productions of the past decade shows, Soviet tropes and sites indeed continue to be important construction material for new serialized narratives. Their ideological meaning, however, is more often than not substituted for a genre-bound convention: the Russian male melodrama (*The Brigade*), the rehabilitation of private life in a sitcom (*My Fair Nanny*) or a feel-good Cinderella story for the modern times (*Be Not Born Beautiful*). While these tropes will no doubt continue to be used for emotional or comedic effect, their referent — the Soviet space — is no more. These shows reveal what might be the ultimate “secret” of Putin's Russia: while many Western critics take Putin's “tough” PR stance for a genuine return to the Soviet /Cold War culture and economy, the country is in fact integrating into the global economy and culture. New cultural sensitivity and new global genres participate in the emergence of new ideology, however labored and conflicted this process will be, negotiating the meaning of the new spiral of Russian modernization.

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# COMPARING RUSSIAN, FRENCH AND BRITISH TELEVISION NEWS COMMEMORATIONS OF 9/11: TERROR, EVERYDAY NATION BUILDING AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE UNIVERSAL

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS

*This article broaches the need of television-led nation building projects to frame the traumatic with the everyday, and to map that process onto the ongoing renegotiation of the relationship between the particular and national on one hand, and the transnational and universal on the other. Nowhere is this mapping more vividly revealed than in national mediations of 9/11 anniversaries. In their approach to 9/11 anniversaries, broadcasters convey this sense of the threat of an unprecedented, and continuing, danger to the “universal” human values embodied in the nation they represent, whilst “normalising” the situation as part of the fabric of that nation's everyday life, differentiating “our” capacity to cope with, and properly contextualise it, from “their” tendency to ignore, or hyperbolise, its true meaning. The article compares Russia with Britain and France, concluding that all three engage in distinctive instrumentalisations of 9/11 for national purposes. But it is Russian Channel 1 whose abstraction of a universalised, post 9/11 terrorist “evil” renders it most transferable to other contexts, and most significant in terms of its potential for the nation building strategy.*

**Keywords:** nation building, news, 9/11, anniversary, commemoration, transnational, universal, particular

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## TELEVISION COMMEMORATIONS AND EVERYDAY NATION BUILDING

The role of annual “media events” in the nation building strategies of television channels close to official, “establishment” cultures in their respective countries is familiar from the work of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz. Much of their analysis relates to regularly recurring national festivals, sporting events, royal birthdays and the like. They refer to “holidays that spotlight some central value or some aspect of collective memory” in which “organizers and broadcasters resonate together” in the portrayal of “an idealized version of society” (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p. ix, 14). As they argue, media events are key to the construction of the “imagined communities” which, with the erosion of genuinely communal ways of living, modern nation builders require to bind their subjects together in common cause.

The media events that Dayan and Katz have in mind occur at regular (often annual) intervals, rather than on a daily basis, but they nonetheless form part of the culture of the familiar, the reassuring, and the “everyday” in its broadest sense which state and public service broadcasters draw upon in their nation building strategies. Also part of this televisual culture of the everyday, however, is coverage of commemorative events marking the key dates of certain national and international disasters and tragedies. Such commemorations have the unique capacity to recreate in the national imaginary the collective sense of shock generated by the conflicts and traumas which have shaped a nation’s history, and at the same time, therapeutically to “work through,” familiarise and explain them, thus consolidating the national sense of “togetherness,” reminding people of the unity of purpose and the shared values forged in the common experience of those traumas.

Commemoration thus involves both re-enactment (or re-performance), and re-framing or (re)interpretation). This calibration of repetition by transformation, of the familiar, the recurrent and the reassuring by the alien, the singular and the unexpected, is the essence of news reporting. It corresponds to what Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin refer to as television news’s dual “amplification and containment” strategy, pursued in order to promote “immediacy and liveness” yet “repetition and sanitisation” (2007, pp.188-189), rendering commemoration a figure for news making in its nation-building dimension.

A variant on the commemorative media event is the anniversary of the major international tragedy. This is of particular significance in the period of global communication, when distinctions between the national and the transnational have become blurred. In their coverage of such anniversaries, news broadcasters re-negotiate their relationship with other cultures, and, crucially, with conceptions of the transnational and the universal. For the transnational designates two interrelated phenomena reflecting the alternative meanings of the prefix “trans” as both “across” and “beyond”: (i) *the transnational as co-extensive with the national* (the historical coincidence of the birth of



nationalism with the onset of modern communications technology instigates the principle that nations define themselves in relation to other nations with which they subsist in a perpetual interaction facilitated by the tools of mass communication)<sup>1</sup>; (ii) *the transnational as synonymous with the universal* (or supranational) (i.e. with those meanings which transcend borders and eschew national differentiation and, for that very reason, provide a tool of legitimisation for national identity projects).

The nexus of issues outlined combines (i) television news-led nation building projects, (ii) the need for those projects to frame the traumatic with the everyday, and (iii) the mapping of that process onto the ongoing renegotiation of the relationship between the particular and national on one hand, and the transnational and universal on the other. Nowhere is this nexus more vividly revealed than in national television mediations of 9/11 anniversaries. With their fetishistic attention to the dramatic imagery of the World Trade Centre, billowing with smoke, 9/11 anniversary broadcasts still stir memories of trauma and shock in audiences across the world. They also temper the re-enactment prerogative with ever more creative attempts to assert local control over the attack's meaning, to incorporate it into the familiar, universalist value systems defining western national creeds, yet also to reposition those creeds in reaction to sudden ebbs, flows, tensions and shifting priorities in the global alliance against Islamist terror.

Many western countries have their own experiences of Islamist fundamentalism, yet in the War on Terror narrative to which they all subscribe, 9/11 remains the originary act, the *Ur*-event, to which subsequent terror incidents are traceable, and to which, in that narrative's representational regime, they unceasingly refer; the start of the new era which it defines (Furedi, 2007, p. 1, 3, 9).

In their approach to 9/11 anniversaries, broadcasters convey this sense of the threat of an unprecedented, and continuing, danger to the "universal" human values embodied in the nation they represent, whilst "normalising" the situation as part of the fabric of that nation's everyday life, differentiating "our" capacity to cope with, and properly contextualise it, from "their" tendency to ignore, or hyperbolise, its true significance.

The logical approach to exploring the nexus is through comparative study of 9/11 anniversary coverage in nations inscribed within the post 9/11 security environment. Rather than focus on the US, we have, then, selected three European nations — Britain, France, and Russia - which share similarities in their postcolonial relations with Islamic states and varying degrees of involvement in the "War on Terror." They also exhibit marked differences of media and political cultures and policy towards Muslim minorities, and form a geo-political spectrum of attitudes to the nation on whose soil the 9/11 attacks took place.

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<sup>1</sup>See Anderson's (1991) notion of "imagined communities" on which modern nationhood is founded and in which the media play a leading role.

We base our research on recordings from the main evening bulletins on channels considered close to the Establishment viewpoint in each country (BBC1, France 2, Channel 1).

## COMMEMORATION NARRATIVES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE UNIVERSAL

Our method of tackling the issues outlined centres upon the mutual superimposition of three familiar distinctions in logical stages. These stages do not determine the sequencing of our analysis which draws on them in differing combinations, depending on discursive context. Each stage adds a new layer of complexity, and thus further semiotic potential, to what we posit as a struggle to achieve dominance over the meaning of 9/11. Our implicit point of departure is that commemorative ritual as reflected in the generic form adopted by television coverage of 9/11 anniversaries is essentially narrative in its orientation. For, whatever its purposes and biases, it is invariably directed towards the retrieval of a past event for present scrutiny.

At the root of our analysis is the dual function of commemoration as a narrative which must both recreate the trauma of the past and re-interpret it. As Jakobson (1956) and Brooks (1992) have shown, narratives navigate between two poles: (1) the metaphoric pole which operates on the principle of equivalence: the condensation of sets of resemblances into a paradigm, canon or model within which any member can substitute for any other, but which may privilege one member at any given moment; (2) the metonymic pole which operates on the principle of displacement: the movement away from an origin on the basis of the principle of adjacency which can either reinforce the abiding presence of that origin, or create distance from it. The two poles function at all times as a unity: metaphoric modelling providing the necessary narrative “closure” to complement metonymic displacement’s capacity for furnishing infinite movement towards a desired “end.”

Modelling and displacement each map onto both the re-creative and the re-interpretative functions of commemoration. Thus, by inserting a commemoration report into a canon of similar, more recent, events in which 9/11 retains primacy, the original catastrophe of 2001 may be recreated in the memories of viewers. However, if through that act of insertion, 9/11 loses its primacy to another event in a new evaluation of its broader significance, the modelling can also serve the cause of re-interpretation. Equally, a displacement of the 9/11 trauma onto an adjacent issue or phenomenon (a disruption to the lives of the survivors; a conflict elsewhere in the world of which 9/11 is posited as the source) might remind viewers of the trauma of 2001 by serving as its indexical sign, or it might cause them to inflate or downgrade its true significance — to reconfirm its value within the mythological temporality of everyday ritual, or alternatively to “de-sacralise” it by plunging it into the contingent, linear time of the ephemeral news agenda.

In the third stage of our logical mapping, the re-interpretative aspect of commemorations involves the universalisation and/or the particularisation of 9/11. Thus, establishing post-9/11 terror assaults within the familiar series of which 9/11 is the model subordinates those assaults to their “progenitor” as particular to universal (Beslan as “the Russian 9/11”). But if such events are deemed to take precedence over their progenitor in the terror canon (7/7’s “homegrown” perpetrators as the main target of a re-prioritised fight against global terrorism), then 9/11 itself is relegated to the status of a particular variant on a model of which it no longer constitutes the prime essence, indicating the reassertion of the metonymic pole. Conversely, a commemoration narrative which displaces 9/11’s significance onto the broader security culture which succeeded it ultimately consolidates the universal significance of the original outrage by normalising the obsessive concern with the terror threat that it instigated as a recurrent, “everyday reality,” marking, through the closure it achieves, a swing back towards the metaphoric pole. But a report with a displaced focus on problems in post 9/11 Iraq, or on revelations undercutting the official version of the narrative, diminishes the significance of the Twin Towers attack to that of a contingent particularity whose claims to eternal value reflect narrow US interests. Thus, the mutual intertwinement of narrative poles, and the balancing act broadcasters perform, often entails a single normalising or modelling effect fulfilling “universalising” and “particularising” functions simultaneously.

As the last example indicates, the assignation of universal or particular status to the 9/11 terror attacks, and of positive or negative value to those statuses, is dependent on the perspective from which they are viewed. For it is in reacting to, and implicitly polemicising with, the post 9/11 narratives of others that the commemoration rhetoric of national selves (British, French, Russian) is constituted. In the perpetual recalibrations and repositionings generated by the dialogic interaction, “our” particular is liable to be universalised and accorded positive value, “their” universalism to be accorded particular status and negativised, bearing in mind, however, that the identity parameters of “us” and “them” is likewise prone to regular reconfiguration.

Finally, the transformations in the relationship between particular and universal indicate its contested nature. They therefore impel us to keep in mind the “performativity” (Butler, 1997) of representation: the need for national broadcasters constantly to re-authenticate the dominance of their version of the 9/11 narrative, even as they present it as natural and authoritative, to participate in, as well as to depict, the annual ritual of commemoration.

Our analysis is based on recordings from BBC1, France 2 and Channel 1 on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September over three years (2007, 2008, and 2009), though in Russia’s case we touch also on relevant aspects of coverage of the 2007 Beslan anniversary. We explore the context, length, position in the running order, and structure of the reports, situating our

commentary on these features within our broadly narratological framework which we deploy in loose, *ad hoc* fashion rather than according to a rigid template, proceeding by country.

We point to an interlocking system of affiliations and disaffiliations in which the nationally differentiated performance of commemoration outweighs its uniform transnational representation, and which cut across one another, reinvigorating the significance of the national. In embracing the annual ritual of remembering 9/11, each broadcaster inserts itself into the play of universal and particular, “everyday” and “unique,” in a manner which not only enables it to maximise the nation building potential inherent in the event, but also constantly to recalibrate the relationship of the nation that it represents to the multiplicity of others against which that nation defines itself.

## BBC1

### 2007

September 2007 is already 6 years after the events of 9/11. It also coincides with a change of direction on the part of a post-Blair Labour Government keen to abjure the rhetoric of the US War on Terror. This has ramifications for a broadcaster positioning itself at a distance from the US-led anti-terror campaign, and in line with the direction of movement of a growing anti-Labour consensus.

The shifts are of relevance to the split logic of commemorative narratives, since they highlight the dilemma of needing at once (a) to honour the victims of the assault, recreating the momentous horror of the event, and (b) to reassess its true significance, establishing a critical distance from the spontaneous outpourings it originally evoked. This, meanwhile, echoes the double imperative to present events as new and different from within a familiar, “readable” format. Commemorations raise a difficulty here in their central concern with ritualistic repetition and time-honoured formats which must somehow be preserved, even as each year’s coverage is distinguished from preceding ones.

BBC1’s commemoration coverage on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2007 condenses these issues into a single point. For, strictly speaking, there was no separate report. Instead, a short sub-report on the commemoration frames a longer piece (3 minutes, 7 seconds) on the “surge” of US troops into post-Saddam Iraq, indicating a strong, initial orientation towards the displacement pole of narrative. The report was positioned 4<sup>th</sup> in the running order of a bulletin consisting of 8 stories of roughly equal duration. It adopted a distanced, factual tone, focusing on the criticisms levelled at the Bush administration’s Iraq strategy.<sup>2</sup> The only

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<sup>2</sup>Ruigrok & van Atteweldt (2007, p. 73) note that the domestication of news began with coverage of the first 9/11 commemoration.

deviation comes at the beginning of the report with a montage including close ups of the 9/11 mourners, a short extract from the list of victims read one by one, the tolling bell marking the anniversary, and photographs of the dead. John Simpson's commentary is suitably sombre, performing the BBC's participation in the commemorative ritual:

The sixth anniversary of one of the worst moments in American history. And the pain doesn't get any easier to bear. (BBC1, 11/9.07)

This is succeeded by a familiar visual reminder — a metaphoric modelling - of al Qaeda's persistence in the collective consciousness of the "civilised world" in connection with the release of a new Bin Laden recording timed to coincide with the anniversary. Here, the commentary, accompanied by the now iconic amateur video footage of Bin Laden's message, changes, marking the transition to the main segment dealing with the "surge":

Meanwhile the man responsible for it all is still alive, still free, and still taunting America. In the new video he praises one of the hijackers. (ibid.)

The scene then switches to the US congressional hearing at which scepticism is voiced about the post 9/11 strategy. The footage ends with a question to the commander of NATO troops in Iraq, from a senator who asks if the general believes there is a link between 9/11 and the Iraq conflict; the laconic answer, highlighted by Simpson: "Not that I am aware of, Senator." Simpson's report thus subversively reinterprets 9/11's hallowed position in the official war on terror canon that official commemorations invoke.<sup>3</sup>

This deliberate gesture — the performance of commemoration through non-commemoration — signals the de-ceremonialising or "normalisation" of 9/11. Yet the embedding strategy also posits 9/11 as the source of a series of events which transcend the hunt for Bin Laden, the origin of a metonymic chain of displacements, intended and unintended, positive and negative. Rather than *diminishing* the significance of the originary assault, the embedding device *inflates* it by establishing it as the root of a broader phenomenon guaranteed to secure its permanent, if controversial, legacy. Complementing the displacement effect, the 9/11 myth also possesses what, for Brooks (1992, p. 95), amounts to a complementary modelling function: that which arrests the metonymic slippage away from the narrative source, from "the slidings, the mistakes, and partial recognitions of the middle," reconfirming its status as the ultimate reference point of all that ensued in its wake: "that moment when past and present hold together."

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<sup>3</sup>Tota (2005, p. 57) characterises 9/11 as involving a "low conflict over the public version of the past" as compared with other terrorist incidents she analyses.

The embedded narrative structure formalises this dual metonymic/metaphoric operation, re-establishing 9/11 as the single, extra-temporal moment: the root and meaning (positive and negative) of the “slidings and mistakes” of the vast security operation that it generated.<sup>4</sup> If, on this basis, we ultimately assign the report a universalising function, we need also to note, however, that its studied distance from the canonic account of 9/11 enacts a disjunction between national broadcaster and a Blair government tarred with the brush of subservience to America’s transnational hegemony, an endorsement of “authentic” British particularism in contrast to discredited official US claims to universality.

The familiarly grainy, amateur video imagery of Bin Laden — a key member of the 9/11 visual canon — reasserts the role of the universal, this time in its negative incarnation. At this level, the rarely heard sound of the al Qaeda leader’s voice as he intones his tribute to the “true” (anti)martyrs of the 9/11 narrative, translated on screen, *re-concretises* the fading image of the universal horror of 9/11 (BBC1, 11/9/07).

But in their juxtaposition with the amateur video’s shocking counter narrative of personal heroism, the weeping face close-ups of the “genuine” widow-heroines silently humanise the universal horror of 9/11 and prevent it from sliding into the ghostly abstraction characterising its faceless perpetrators.<sup>5</sup> This juxtaposition embodies the circular play of abstract and concrete, universal and particular which defines the report, and in which the constant drift and inversion of terms has a direct bearing on representations of both the Islamist “threat” and its US-led antithesis.

## 2008

In 2008 the BBC reverted briefly to a performative practice typical of its earlier commemorative reports. The bulletin began with a sequence in which the silence enveloping the Ground Zero ceremony coincided with that of the headline segment, as the static camera dwelt on the bell used to mark the precise time of the attack. The relative length of the commemoration report itself coincided with television’s “present tense” mode, enabling it to perform the mood of melancholic remembrance. At another level, the switch from calculated distance to mournful engagement illustrates what Hoskins (2004, p.115) calls the

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<sup>4</sup>The connection between universality, 9/11 as metaphor and 9/11 as source of an unlimited metonymic spread is implicit in Žižek’s (2002, p. 111) account of the “metaphorical universalisation of the signifier ‘terror’ ... terror is ... gradually elevated into the hidden universal equivalent of all social evils.”

<sup>5</sup>Simpson has this in mind when he contrasts the 9/11 dead with their executioners: “Thus, they are ... icons of patriotic life ... saturated with meaning. They connect the present to the past and the future ... Meanwhile the empty signifier that is ‘terrorism’ cannot be given ... a place and name if it is to survive as the indicator of an unspeakable and unknowable antagonist” (2006, pp. 51-52).

“modulation and simultaneity of times ... compressed in [television’s] output,” its tendency to “forget” from one year to the next.<sup>6</sup>

The contradictory temporalities map onto the shifting universal/particular relationship: from the grieving American faces as supranational human sufferers, to the critiques of America’s global war on terror for the purposes of particularising it as a national endeavour; the Ground Zero shots are accompanied by a headline including the statement that: “New questions have been posed in relation to America’s tactic in fighting Islamic terrorism” (BBC1, 9/11/08). The report commences with a montage of American flags, weeping relatives and photographs of the lost, accompanied by the soulful sounds of a choir and the reporter’s stentorian words:

September 11 will never be just another anniversary. In 7 years the people of this city have moved on. But the simple numbers 9 and 11 are etched on their hearts forever. (ibid.)

Human sympathies are further stirred by the sight of a young boy reading a tribute to his father:

My Dad died on September 11. But he is not gone. Just look at each of our faces and you will see him shine on through us. We love you Daddy. (ibid.)

As in 2007, however, most of the report consists of a hard-nosed assessment of the difficulties faced by allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The transition to the new modality is marked by a switch of scene, interspersed with one of the BBC’s few, visual citations of the 9/11 attacks, and of tone:

It was the day that, as anyone watching this knows, changed everything. And at the Pentagon today, as President Bush unveiled a memorial, he repeated his rationale for the wars that he launched, following these attacks ... But even as they remember, many doubt that. (ibid.)

Thereon, the slow progress in Iraq and the chaos in Afghanistan displace 9/11 from centre stage, stitched metonymically to the commemoration by a graphics device depicting sweeping movement across a globe: the visual incarnation of an alternative “war on terror”

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<sup>6</sup>Neil Postman (1986, p. 112) comments:

We are so thoroughly adjusted to the “Now this ...” world of news ... that all assumptions of coherence have vanished. And so, perforce, has contradiction. In the context of no context ... it simply disappears.

canon which the displacement inaugurates (9/11 as source of a series of US-led misadventures), its verbal correlative contained in the reporter's wry conclusion:

Afghanistan was the first country coalition troops came to after 9/11, but victory was declared too fast. Seven years on it could still be the last place they leave. (ibid.)

Absent is any depiction of the Muslim insurgents, although the commentary repeatedly cites the dire threat they pose. This is echoed in the lack of reference to Islam in the preceding ceremonial coverage. The echoing points up the contradiction underlying the humanist project with which commemorative narratives ally themselves. The purpose of recalling the attacks is inseparable from the "clash of civilizations" rhetoric in which they were instantly enwrapped and which continues to shape the metaphoric system the narratives draw upon. Thus, the gesture of embracing humanity in its supranational plenitude embodied in the moving sequence opening the 2008 report has force only if it is posited against an "out group" which rejects that gesture. In this, the two post 9/11 narratives and the models they invoke ("official/US" and "alternative/BBC") act in consort.

## 2009

In 2009, the association between 9/11 and a distinctly non-universal War on Terror intensifies. The BBC bulletin of 11<sup>th</sup> September lacks a 9/11 commemoration report even in embedded form. Instead, coverage is woven into two separate reports placed 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> in the running order. The first (3 minutes 32 seconds in duration) is a security story about accusations of torture levelled against MI6 — a direct consequence of Britain's accession to the US-led campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, the preceding ceremonial shots remind us of the original source of a metonymic displacement process leading inexorably away from the universal shock of 2001 and towards the ill-conceived partisan operation which both newsreader and reporter pointedly designate "*America's War on Terror*":

America's war on terror has been running for 8 years today. And it's looking increasingly possible that one of the casualties of the war will be the reputation of Britain's intelligence services. (BBC1, 9/11/09)

The reporter, Home Affairs correspondent, Daniel Sandford, concludes his report, interspersed with footage of American helicopters, by reminding us that "[s]o far these are only allegations about Britain's conduct in the war on terror. Nobody has been charged" (ibid.). The slippage from "America's war on terror" to "Britain and the war on terror" reveals another paradox of the universal/singular relationship. For the rejection of the partisan singularity of the American Other is articulated from *the point of view* of the



supranational Self. The fact that the British government is now tarred with the same brush only bolsters the “non-partisan” BBC’s claims to speak from a position beyond national particularity. The familiar, moving shots of individual griever to which the report turns at the end are appropriated from the 9/11 paradigm of images by the BBC which exposes the war on terror’s parochial concerns by performing a “purer” universality.

The configuration of terms shifts again when Sandford, now seated in the news studio, turns to the discovery of a domestic Islamist plot to “blow planes out of the sky” and the screen fills with the familiar-looking mugshots of 4 Muslim suspects, reasserting the link to 9/11 as the model for all terror attacks.

Later, a report (3 minutes and 4 seconds in duration) from a BBC security correspondent, Gordon Ferrera, assesses the continuing threat posed by Bin Laden in the context of the anniversary (*ibid.*) Once more, Britain and the “civilised world” are co-situated within a transnational, alliance. The opening segment is a swift montage of images including the instantly recognisable shots of grieving relatives, a still photograph of the devastated World Trade Centre,<sup>7</sup> and a close up of a grave-faced Obama at the ceremony. The soundtrack is dominated by the litany of names.

Commenting on Bin Laden’s loss of Muslim support, Ferrera invokes the specialist opinions of security experts. But, against the backdrop of a world map depicting al Qaeda’s spread, he next warns of the diversification of the terrorist movement’s attention to North Africa. The report is punctuated by a graphic device in which a familiar photographic image of Bin Laden dissolves into multiple fragments, then reforms anew, recapitulating a new movement from universal to singular and back: for Bin Laden is the epitome of “negative universality” — that of the abstract threat without ground, liable at any point to splinter into a thousand, unconnected shards, or to reform as a single, baleful presence. As if to reinforce the contrast, the report ends by switching briefly to the roll call of 9/11 victims, the site of individual grief as supranational suffering. Ferrera concludes:

Eight years on there may be cause for cautious optimism, but just as nobody predicted 9/11, no one can really be sure what comes next. (*ibid.*)

Ferrera’s ominous last phrase condenses 9/11’s function as world-transforming metaphoric model of future attacks (“nobody predicted”), its capacity to combine past, present and future in one moment (“Eight years ... there may be ... what comes next”), and its universalising power (“no one”). The modulating play of universal and particular, abstract and concrete, shapes the story’s entire narrative structure.

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<sup>7</sup>As Hoskins (2004, p. 116) points out, since they are “inherently elegiac,” photographs offer a permanence that the immediacy of television images lack.

## FRANCE 2

### 2007

Though representing a country less involved in the War on Terror, France 2 accords 9/11 commemorations considerable prominence. A report on the eve of the 2007 anniversary (at 6 minutes 17 seconds, by far the longest story in the bulletin) commented on preparations for the New York commemoration. It began with familiar shots of Ground Zero but the narrative was factual and unemotional, reducing shared memories of 9/11 to a local US issue.

The succeeding section focused on Bin Laden, highlighting, like the BBC, the problematic consequences of the US response to 9/11. The newsreader describes the release of the new video as “‘a set back’ (*renvers*) for the Bush administration,” before handing over to a reporter whose listing of the vast resources poured into the search for the perpetrator is accompanied by a montage into which the fugitive’s regular video appearances are pointedly woven (France 2, 8/11/07). Close ups of grainy magazine cover photographs of the al Qaeda leader, contrasted with more recent footage, suspend the Bin Laden image between two extremes: that of an iconic, mythologised past, and that of a present in which he figures as the elusive, individual object of the global search. The visual-verbal interplay plays a crucial role. The reporter concludes:

Invisible, uncapturable (*insaisissable*), six years after the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, Bin Laden continues to succeed in evading his pursuers. (ibid.)

These words are spoken against the backdrop of Bin Laden riding his horse in the Afghan mountains: visible to all, and “captured” on camera, as if to underscore both the extent of the US debacle, the displacement of post 9/11 righteous indignation onto a futile manhunt, and Bin Laden’s transformation from elusive, iconic abstraction into an all-too-concrete presence, re-enacting the living horror of 9/11 in our living rooms.

A New York reporter then expands upon the challenges America faces in Iraq, but with a reference to the recent emergence of al Qaeda cells in North Africa. The report is structured chiastically: beginning with the “particularising of the universal” (the recasting of 9/11 as an American problem) and ending with the placing of a nation-specific issue in universal context (al Qaeda’s infiltration into French-speaking Algeria).

The anniversary day report contrasts with the previous day’s coverage. At 4 minutes 24 seconds it is the longest but one story in the bulletin and first in the running order (the longest is, as we shall see, itself closely linked to the commemoration). It opens with two references to the exact time when the first plane hit the World Trade Centre. This is succeeded by an emotive montage interspersing images of the grieving relatives displaying

photos of their loved ones with dramatic footage of the Twin Towers attack overlaid with the sound of a choir. By incorporating the commemorative mode into its performative strategy, France 2 positions itself at the locus of universality, identified here unambiguously with Ground Zero and the familiar 9/11 model.

As it passes respectfully over the griever, the camera dwells at length on the face of a black woman mourning her husband's death. The reporter translates the first lines of her tearful tribute, inscribing the French commitment to racial equality into its universalisation of the victims' grief.

The Ground Zero sequence is succeeded by information about Bin Laden's latest audio recording, released to coincide with the anniversary. France 2 gives it more airtime than the other channels, detailing how computerised voice analysis technology can gauge the recording's authenticity, as extreme close ups of the sound waves undulate across the computer screen. The attention is partly attributable to the fact that Bin Laden refers for the first time to France as a legitimate al Qaeda target (France 2, 11/9/07).

In this alarming context, the fascination with the authenticity of the voice revitalises the totemic horror of the al Qaeda figurehead, reduced in the years since 2001 to a mass mediated cliché (the resemblance of the sound waves to those on a heart monitor is not coincidental). Continuing to invoke the familiar 9/11 image stock, at this point France 2 accommodates the nation it represents to the universalism of the War on Terror in its supranational mode.

But the most striking feature of the broadcast is the story with which it ends: a 10 minute interview with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Dutch Muslim renegade who now campaigns from New York against Islam's prejudicial treatment of women, and a pariah among many Muslims. Hirsi Ali has been invited to France by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, like Hirsi Ali, a young black woman. The two are interviewed jointly by the newsreader who introduces the piece with a brief reference to the 9/11 commemoration:

It is the 11<sup>th</sup> of September today. The attacks caused a crisis of conscience in you. What was the nature of that crisis exactly? (France 2, 11/9/07)

Hirsi Ali's response is a celebration of the values of free speech and gender equality embodied in her actions and conforming to those of the French constitution. The interview's dual logic and its position in the bulletin recalls the BBC's re-appropriative strategy. Citing 9/11 in support of French national values, Hirsi Ali inverts the relationship pitting America and the universal against France and the national via the post 9/11 "We are all American now" mantra:

"We are all American now." That's what I felt really strongly ... Now I feel that every persecuted woman is a French woman. (ibid.)

The displacement of the locus of universalism reflects a reconfiguration of the paradigm of post 9/11 equivalences, establishing the primacy of the Parisian variant on resistance to fundamentalism. This is confirmed when the Minister frames her endorsement of Hirsi Ali's bravery with a reminder that in France "We have a vision founded on freedom of expression and *laïcité*," and in Ali's contention that she will believe in a rapprochement with Islam only if Muslim women are treated as equal human beings (ibid.).

By separating Ali's interview from the commemoration reports, France 2 encapsulates the universalist paradox. For the other side of commemoration's act of exclusion (that of the Muslim Other whose original abjection it repeats) is the corresponding act of inclusion: the endorsement of a continental version of universalism embracing all religions, and all (enlightened) Muslims.

## 2008

In 2008 *Journal de 20 Heure*'s pre-commemoration report (10/9/08), whilst only 12<sup>th</sup> out of 27 in the running order, is, at 3 minutes 22 seconds, the longest item. It begins conventionally, with shots of Ground Zero today, and in the aftermath of the attacks, focusing on the collection of 9/11 "relics," now displayed in hallowed, museum-like surroundings as metonymic indices recreating the original catastrophe to which they point.<sup>8</sup> But, in contrast with the sacralisation process underway at Ground Zero, the report's main narrative thrust displaces attention to new conspiracy theories suggesting shadowy forces other than al Qaeda are the true perpetrators of the outrage. Details are interlaced both with the Twin Tower footage and with stills of internet websites promoting the conspiracy. Celebrities supporting the theories are interviewed. As dramatic footage of the second plane hitting the World Trade Centre fills the screen, accompanied by the original, shocked commentary of a US journalist, the reporter remarks:

A powerful image, a dramatic tone and a recurring question: why did the twin towers fall so quickly? (ibid)

From that point the report questions the canonic version of post-9/11 America's patriotic unity of purpose; the large proportion of the US population ready to give credence to the conspiracy theorists is repeatedly highlighted as the culmination of what is, effectively, a de-sacralising assault on 9/11 mythology, as the place of the events of 2001 in American popular consciousness is questioned.

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<sup>8</sup>Haskins and DeRose (2003, p. 378) describe how the 9/11 memorial process took on "an archiving mission in an attempt to preserve images and gestures" and acting as "depositories of vernacular expression."

9/11 coverage in the anniversary bulletin itself (11/9/08) is 4<sup>th</sup> out of 16 in the running order, and 4<sup>th</sup> longest in duration (1 minute 58 seconds). The bulletin opens with headline footage of Obama and McCain, contenders for the US Presidency. The main 9/11 report adopts a sombre tone, deferentially quoting the New York mayor's words asserting that the Ground Zero ceremony would mark the world's entry into a new temporality. It then combines close-ups of the ceremony with repeat footage of the attacks and discussion of where the candidates were at the time of the attacks, noting that the event occurred a day after the birth of Obama's second child. Such pseudo-apocryphal speculation balances the previous day's "desacralisation," retrieving the commemoration from a "fallen world" temporality in which 9/11 becomes just another news event in a metonymic sequence, and restoring it to the "eternal" mode of the set of equivalences it epitomises.<sup>9</sup>

## 2009

In 2009 *Journal de 20 Heures* illustrates how the need for television to reframe seminal events from a new angle works in tandem with the imperative to stabilise and universalise them.

The anniversary report, 4<sup>th</sup> in the running order, but, at 6 minutes 58 seconds, by far the longest, divides into three, and features separate reporters. It opens with news of hitherto unseen amateur video footage shot by a doctor as he witnessed the 2001 attacks. The footage is introduced by the newsreader who provides the doctor's name and informs us that "it is he who is filming and his words." The viewer experiences the doctor's disorientation at the sight and sound of the collapsing towers vicariously; the dramatic images occupy the full screen and the doctor's breathless commentary following his flight from the falling masonry dominates the soundtrack (France 2, 11/9/09). The sequence revitalises our memories of the fateful attack, shattering the hardened layers of mass mediated cliché acquired through the ritual replaying of the twin tower footage, furnishing the experience with a point of identification shared by individual witnesses and television audience.

Then, however, the report moves from the vernacular and private to the official and public, as attention turns to President Obama's pronouncement, timed to coincide with the anniversary, that he wants to initiate a new relationship with the Muslim world. The screen is split with one side depicting Obama, and the other side the Ground Zero bell and the 9/11 mourners, foregrounding the metonymic slippage from the eternal and the universal to the

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<sup>9</sup>In this sense, 9/11 commemorations reconcile the competing post-terror temporalities identified by Jarvis (2009, pp. 23-24): that of radical rupture (9/11 as a break with all that preceded it), that of linear continuity (9/11 as one in a normalised series), and that of the metaphysical confrontation of good and evil (9/11 as belonging to an eternal realm).

national and contingent. Thus, the universalism implicit in the amateur video footage is replaced by the contingency expressed in Obama's political gesture against his predecessor's status as national figurehead of the global anti-terror campaign. Here, too, the commemoration becomes the nexus of a network of contradictory forces pulling to and fro between past and present, displacement and modelling, singular and universal, national and transnational.

The third part of the report turns to the hunt for Bin Laden, whose image, along with the twin towers and the grieving relatives, forms a set of visual equivalences constituting the commemoration's iconic trinity. The newsreader opens with a reminder of the "new era" that commenced with 9/11 and confirms Bin Laden's status as abstract universal — the "phantom-like figure" heading the world's "most nebulous" terrorist organisation. The sequence that follows recycles the 2007 report, replicating the movement from "abstract" to "concrete," but in negative mode. Referring to the bounty on Bin Laden's head, it concludes "Eight years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, and in spite of the incredible sum offered, Bin Laden is still on the run" (ibid).

Preceded by an account of further indications of the waning of al Qaeda's potency, the narrative focus is then displaced onto Bin Laden's undiminished reputation in certain Arab countries. The account is illustrated with shots of a new toy consisting of a miniature figure of the al Qaeda leader bought to express resistance to the west. The report ends with the ominous prediction that, despite the decline described by experts, none can be sure that the movement will not strike again. The commentary on the toy is at once comical and sinister. It mocks the futile fanaticism of al Qaeda's supporters, yet warns of the threat that fanaticism poses to us, re-enacting the original post 9/11 angst, restoring the US-led war on terror's claims to engage with the universal and the primacy of the 9/11 model. Appropriately, the succeeding story is a grim account of the death of two French soldiers fighting in Afghanistan.

## CHANNEL I

### 2007

Each year, *Vremia* devotes more air time to ceremonies marking the Beslan tragedy, than it does to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. September 1, when the school siege began, marks the day when Russian children return to school after the summer holidays, bearing gifts for their teachers in a time-honored ritual occupying a sacrosanct place in the Russian calendar, a ritual unifying communist past with post-communist present. If 9/11 was an assault on sacred American space, then Beslan was a calculated affront to hallowed post-Soviet temporality (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, pp. 74-89).

In 2007, *Vremia*'s coverage of the Beslan anniversary included a report in which the families of victims were interviewed along with relatives of 9/11 victims, offering the clearest example of the metaphorisation of 9/11. Its transnational currency casts it as a model for the commemoration of subsequent such tragedies, enabling it, as in Russia's case, to serve a particularistic cause. In his post-Beslan speech Putin himself had portrayed Beslan as a defining moment in his nation-building mission (*Vremia*, 6/09/04). What is also clear is that the modelling function extends to 9/11's status as the beginning of the era of international terrorism. This status is extended to Beslan, ensuring that nothing will ever be the same in Russia. For the same reason, Putin also used his speech to inscribe Russia within the global anti-terror campaign (ibid.).

The commemorative bulletin of September 3, 2007, with its dual focus on 9/11 and Beslan, reinforces the link. The Beslan report is first in the running order, and at 4 minutes 32 seconds, the longest story. The newsreader began with the words: "Today in Russia is a day of grief and solidarity in the fight against terrorism" (Channel 1, 3/9/07). What follows draws on the familiar paradigm of equivalences: close ups of weeping mothers, photographs of the dead, Beslan "relics," interviews with survivors and relatives, the intoning of the list of victims, one by one, a soundtrack dominated by the voices of a church choir. The rhetorical strategy comes to the fore in an excerpt from a speech made by Boris Gryzlov, speaker of the Duma, who refers to Beslan as "the most horrific terror attack in history," calls on the whole world to "annihilate the cancerous tumour that is international terrorism," and implicitly elevates Beslan's status to global symbol of the war on terror, appropriating the supranational rhetoric for national purposes and challenging the primacy of 9/11 in the terror canon.

But to universalise is to erase difference, as is apparent from the newsreader's introduction to the segment dealing with the suffering of the bereaved:

Nobody is insured against attacks from terrorists in the modern world. In the war on terror, the USA, Russia, Great Britain, Spain and Israel have lost thousands of their citizens. The relatives of those who died are now learning to live anew. (ibid.)

The interviews with relatives of victims of 9/11, Beslan, and a Palestinian terror attack in Tel Aviv are structured as a circular narrative. It begins and ends with the Tel Aviv mother whose reference to her lost daughter's unfinished drawing of a rose asserts equivalence between quite disparate events, yet, with its invocation of infant life cut tragically short, authenticates Beslan's universalising singularity, its capacity to emblematised terrorist atrocity in the abstract, to establish primacy in the international canon of terror attacks:

An incomplete drawing of a rose. The symbol of a life which never was given the chance to bloom. (ibid.)

Within the paradoxical logic of war on terror discourse, however, the more generic the abstraction, the more “singular” and nation-specific the cause onto which it is displaced; the polemical subtext of the Beslan anniversary report, and of much Channel 1 coverage, is an aggressive “me-tooism”: contrary to western critiques of its actions in the Caucasus, Russia is at the centre of the struggle to defeat global terror.

*Vremia*’s marking of the 9/11 anniversary tends towards the downbeat. In 2007, the report was brief and factual. Included amongst other foreign news, it was 4<sup>th</sup> out of 18 in the running order and 2 minutes 5 seconds long (though it was followed by a separate 24 second report on the video). The obligatory Twin Tower imagery is replayed during an account of both the commemorative ceremony in New York, and the emergence of the latest Bin Laden video. The report begins with an acknowledgement of the “unprecedented” nature of the 9/11 assault, but then changes in tone as we are told that “the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 11<sup>th</sup> September is marked by conflicts” (Channel 1, 9/11/07).

From that point, the narrative focus is displaced onto disputes raging between the relatives of the 9/11 victims and the US government: one over the authorities’ initial refusal to grant the relatives access to the Ground Zero site, and the second over negligence claims against the air companies. Contrasted with the preceding footage of weeping relatives and choir singing the US National Anthem, the commentary extricates the tragedy from sacred time and plunges it into the contingent temporality of the news agenda for which anniversaries must be framed from hitherto unexpected angles.

Nonetheless, after a cursory account of the new video featuring none of the other two channels’ fascinated horror, latent *schadenfreude* or baleful speculation, the succeeding report treats a Turkish terror incident. The metonymic spread effect is, for Channel 1, conveniently ambiguous: it both de-sacralises 9/11, by displacing it and diminishing its primacy, yet increases its universalising power in the world of contingency by transferring its influence to adjacent contexts.

## 2008

The de-sacralising effect intensifies in 2008, when the 9/11 anniversary dominates the bulletin. It consists of 3 reports totalling 4 minutes 45 seconds, positioned 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> out of 14 in the running order, and dealing with President Medvedev’s brief remarks on the anniversary, the New York ceremony, and the conspiracy theory. Later (9<sup>th</sup> out of 14 items, and at 6 minutes 5 seconds by far the longest), the opinion piece *Odnako* (“However”) is devoted to reflections on the anniversary’s meaning.

The coverage proper begins with a Ground Zero report interspersed with visual reminders of 9/11. The newsreader’s introductory remarks invoke a familiar, supranational rhetoric, inflected with the, now equally familiar, nationally motivated polemic:



One day which changed the world. A challenge to the entire world, and not just to America. (Channel 1, 11/9/08)

Medvedev develops the polemical angle, calling on America to collaborate over fighting international terrorism, rather than support corrupt regimes in Georgia (the anniversary coincided with the end of the South Ossetian conflict). The New York report balances this by stressing the event's universal significance reflected in the victims' "diverse nationalities," a point elaborated in a gloss on the coordination of the sounding of the anniversary bell with that of other church bells (*ibid.*).

The 9/11 victims were universal in their origins and wider significance, for the attacks targeted a transnational community on national soil. But the "multinational, multifaith" mantra is also that of the Putin regime as it struggles to quell inter-ethnic tension in Russia which is in part a result of the flow of migrants from the former Soviet republics, and in part of the very efforts to write Russia into the war against Islamic militancy undertaken by the Kremlin in the aftermath of Beslan.

Equally significant are the generic references to "international terrorism" rather than Islamic jihadism, illustrating the dual performance of universalism as exclusion ("we are as one against the Other") and inclusion ("the metaphysical terrorist Other is epitomised in al Qaeda"), but also the suppression of the global-Islamist dimension in light of concern over national sensitivities.

The third report expands on the conspiracy story, packaged as a report within a report with its own dramatised graphics and an interview with an "expert" who accuses the US government of having known in advance about the attacks, recasting as narrowly parochial a purportedly "universal" narrative. Unlike France 2, Channel 1 highlights just one theory, disseminated in what is elevated to the status of a "documentary film" which, with its garish provocations emblazoned across the screen, bleeds dangerously into the fabric of Channel 1's report:

The attacks were not completely unexpected. They were anticipated. They were prepared for. (*ibid.*)

The conspiracy's theorist's profane gesture is legitimised by the *Odnako* insert, fronted by the anti-western commentator, Mikhail Leont'ev. Leont'ev positions himself on the safer ground of the metonymic adjacency of 9/11, the ill-fated invasion of Iraq, and the American mishandling of the situation in Iran. The thrust is that the US and its allies are pursuing pseudo-imperialist goals, according universalism a negative value: no longer is it equated with "the global good" embodied in post 9/11 righteous anger, but rather with a hegemonic impulse which, even on the day of its anniversary, 9/11 can no longer excuse. Leont'ev launches a vituperative tirade:

Having destroyed Iraq, the Americans have to destroy Iran as well ... The fig leaf of the 11<sup>th</sup> of September has already done its work. (ibid.)

Albeit indirectly, Islam now finds itself on the side of right.

## 2009

That so many modulations of transnational universalism inhabit one report is partly the function of the fact that news bulletins, even those of state broadcasters, are not “texts” and neither strive for, nor are expected to attain, the univocal coherence textual analysis seeks to impose. The non-coherence principle extends across bulletins and years. Whilst 9/11 commemorations are an annual ritual, news programmes do not “remember” how the events were covered previously; patterns of progression occur at subliminal levels determined by vagaries in the political environment in which they operate. In 2009, with Obama’s election heralding a reduction in US-Russian tensions, *Vremia* eschewed the trenchant critique of 2008.

The 9/11 report, 5<sup>th</sup> out of 12 in the running order, is, at 1 minute 9 seconds, one of the shortest of recent years. It opens with a montage of images from the ceremony punctuated by the 2001 footage. The commentary is respectful:

In the USA today they are remembering the horrific terror attacks in New York and Washington... in a silence broken only by the funereal music and the striking of the bell.  
(*Vremia*, 11/09/09)

As it scans the crowd of mourners, the camera alights on a woman bearing the photographic image of her loved one — a commemoration device drawn from a set of visual equivalences with global recognition value, but also specific local resonance (Beslan coverage was replete with photos of missing sons and daughters).

The account of the ceremony is followed by hitherto unseen amateur video footage of the second plane hitting the Twin Towers, translating mass mediated iconology into individual testimony, conflating the “new angle” requirement with the reversion to transnational universalism. On this level, *Vremia* recasts 9/11 as human tragedy.

The report’s brevity signals distance from the US’s indulgence in post 9/11 grief, and from the global resistance to terror that the US claims to lead, displacing it onto a broad mass of adjacent foreign events, thus diminishing its singular significance in the news agenda. But the distancing gesture also marks the naturalisation of the global security culture that 9/11 brought in its wake: so endemic is the international terrorist threat that there is no longer any need to highlight the universally important event that was its apotheosis. Significantly, the 2009 *Vremia* commemoration report is succeeded by a story about a terror incident in

Dagestan. In this sense, the de-universalising of 9/11 at one level (that of the event as the inauguration of a US-led campaign on behalf of civilised humanity) serves to re-universalise it at another (that of the attacks as the act of an international terrorist campaign of indeterminate origins, duration and reach). The iconic image of the portrait-bearing widow binds the narratives together as one.

## CONCLUSIONS: COMMEMORATION, COMPARISON AND THE COSMOPOLITAN

Several common themes emerge from our analysis: 1) the media struggle for proprietorship of the universality embodied in the 9/11 narrative is reflected in constant modulations and inversions characterising the universal/particular dynamic that drives the meaning-making process; 2) this instability relates to the dual function of displacement as a means of localising the significance of the 2001 events within a particular spatio-temporal context, and “normalising” them as the source of a limitless spread of meaning; 3) the distinction intersects with that between 9/11 as prime metaphoric model of subsequent terrorist attacks, and as but one event in a canon whose hierarchy is subject to contestation and change; 4) it is informed by the differing demands that commemorative narratives must fulfil: recreating the trauma of the original event, yet subjecting it to re-evaluation; restoring it to an eternal temporality, yet plunging it into the contingent ephemerality of the news agenda; 5) far from threatening national distinctiveness, the universalist rhetoric of the US-led global war on terror provides the discursive ground for the re-authentication of European nation building strategies; as Brubaker (1996) has argued, nations are not stable, self-equivalent entities, but the product of relational processes involving elements that both transcend and subtend them. Thus, news recollections of 9/11 invoke simultaneously the *transnational* al Qaeda menace, the *subnational* threat posed by domestic Muslim radicalism, and the articulation of a *supranational* humanism; 6) whilst Islam tends not to feature overtly in post 9/11 rituals, the very humanist project they articulate is founded on its implied exclusion; through the ubiquitous Bin Laden iconography it is drawn indirectly into the play of universal and particular, positive and negative, defining commemoration narratives.

Throughout, we emphasised what the bulletins were *doing* with 9/11 commemorations, rather than what they were *saying* about them, how they participated in, or asserted distance from, them, as well as how they represented them — enabling us to distinguish, where appropriate, the position taken by national channels from the official line of the states to which they are tied.

The common tendencies are differently foregrounded. Thus, the deployment of commemorative culture within a modulating hierarchy of equivalences finds its clearest expression in the “sacralisation” of Beslan perpetrated by Channel 1, which also engages in

the crudest instrumentalisation of 9/11 for national purposes. It is Channel 1, too, whose abstraction of post 9/11 terrorist “evil” renders it most transferable to other contexts.

France 2 shares Channel 1’s inclination to immerse 9/11’s sacred temporality in the profane and the ephemeral (the attention accorded to conspiracy theories). It also provides the clearest example of how channels appropriate the universalist rhetoric of the commemorations and posit the nation they represent as its true locus (the Hirsi Ali interview). Finally, it best articulates the negative pairing of general and particular to which the positive linkage of individual mourner to universal humanity stands in contrast (its re-embodiment of the transnational abstraction of al Qaeda as the corporeal, but alienated, form of Bin Laden’s voice).

BBC1 has progressed furthest in “normalising” 9/11 within its news agenda (its eschewal of “Twin Towers” imagery; its tendency to embed 9/11 commemoration coverage within a larger corpus of security-related narratives). Yet, for this reason it is well equipped to detach the universal values such commemorations invoke from their national contexts, to articulate a universalist position that is transnational in a more complete sense, and thus to mount a critique of war on terror rhetoric.

Despite the differences in representational strategy, and the radically divergent contexts, all three channels evince a contradictory struggle to integrate the particular and the general, and to accommodate the exceptionality of the global terrorist outrage within the everyday rituals and routines of national broadcasting. At a meta-analytic level, our very efforts to identify such commonalities, and to separate them out from the multitude of differences, reveal the universalising essence of the comparative method. The corollary to our critical exposé of the willingness of national broadcasters to enlist “universal terror” in the cause of parochial self interest should not be to evoke a terror of the universal itself.

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# TELEVISION NEWS AND ITS SATIRICAL INTERPRETATION IN MEDVEDEV'S RUSSIA: IS GLASNOST BACK?

NATALIA RULYOVA

*The article focuses on television in Dmitrii Medvedev's Russia through the prism of glasnost. It analyses daily television news stories, as they are posted on the official Channel One website, and weekly satirical interpretations of news programmes presented to the Russian nation on Channel One. These two aspects of television programming are indicative of the development of glasnost and transparency in Medvedev's Russia. News stories are examined in terms of newsworthiness, and satirical shows — in terms of the targets of political satire. First, a brief historical account of the term "glasnost" is given to lay out the framework for analysis. Then frame analysis is applied to examine representational modes, discourse and myths used to package Channel One news stories that were broadcast in the period of October 2009 to January 2010. Then, the article focuses on the representation of the satirical in *The Spotlight on Parishilton* (*Prozhektorperishilton*) and *The Animated Personality* (*Mul't lichnosti*), two Channel One satirical shows that appeared since Medvedev's inauguration. Television programmes are compared with similar material available on the Russian-language internet, which remains mainly free of state control, and thus provides a point of reference for identifying the boundaries of glasnost on television.*

**Keywords:** glasnost, television, Youtube, news, satirical shows, Medvedev, Putin.

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In Russia, the role of television in nation building cannot be underestimated. On a daily basis, television audiences are fed with government-sponsored and ideologically charged programmes including the news, documentaries, serials and many others. But has television become less controlled under Medvedev? Is there a sign of glasnost returning? Some journalists and analysts have used this term recently to describe the situation under Medvedev. Is this so?

Along with vodka, matrioshka and perestroika, glasnost has become part of Russian national identity. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been periodically used to create narratives of an open, transparent, and progressive Russia which appeal to the West. After the eight years of Putin's authoritarian regime, which suppressed glasnost and its discourses, it has started to reappear in Medvedev's Russia. In different guises, glasnost is again used in nation-building and other public discourses. For instance, in his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on 12 November 2009, Medvedev emphasises the importance of "the development of strategic and informational technologies," which create channels of openness and transparency in the work of local authorities and help fight against corruption. He also highlights the government's plans to provide broadband internet in the Russian provinces, which will create a platform for "free public discussions on any topics" and will provide access to information about the situation in the country and the world (Medvedev, 2009b). Assuming that Medvedev conveys these messages during his daily appearances on television and through his frequent use of the internet, the discourses of glasnost must be spreading in the media.

This article aims to assess the extent to which glasnost has recently been present on Channel One. However, prior to that it is necessary to give a brief historical overview of the term "glasnost" and discuss several meanings, which has circulated in the media. The article argues that although the discourses of glasnost have penetrated the media, the connotations of the term "glasnost" are different in the official mass media, such as Channel One, and on internet sites, such as youtube. The clashes between the different uses of the term become apparent when glasnost discourses are compared in programmes of the same genre on television and the internet. To begin with, it is necessary to define the term.

In the Dal' dictionary of the Russian language, the word glasnost, whose root is *glas* (voice), is defined in the article about voice as "something that is known or well known, announcement, publicity."<sup>1</sup> Natalie Gross, on the other hand, highlights the political connotation of the term and traces it to the reign of Tsar Nicholas I in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it referred to "an exchange of opinions within the bureaucracy about the country's much needed social and economic transformation" (Gross, 1987, p. 69). In

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<sup>1</sup>Here and thereafter translation is the author's unless otherwise noted.

response to these reforms and, in particular, the weakening of censorship after the abolishment of serfdom, Fedor Dostoevsky described glasnost using two metaphors, the sea and a little devil, both of which point to the double-edged character of glasnost; if left uncontrolled it could bring pain as well as goodness: "And there poured out, like a sea, beneficent glasnost...we love glasnost and we caress it like a newborn child. We love this little devil who has just cut small, strong, and healthy teeth. Sometimes he bites randomly; he has not yet learned to bite properly"<sup>2</sup> (Dostoevsky, 1993, p. 36). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the term "glasnost" was used in relation to two spheres of public life: the media (including literary journals and literature) and politics.

The next significant period in the evolution of the term glasnost was the Leninist one. According to Brian McNair, Lenin first used the term in "What is to be Done?" where glasnost is referred to as publicity and an "indicator of democracy" (McNair, 1991, p. 29). McNair points out that Lenin used the word glasnost in two senses: "positive glasnost" signified "openness" and "publicity" in coverage of positive phenomena; and the "critical dimension of glasnost" involved "criticism and self-criticism in relation to negative economic and social phenomena" (ibid., p. 29). Both are important, according to Lenin, in order to provide examples of the attractive and of the repulsive.

It is also instructive to compare Lenin's interpretations of glasnost with his understanding of freedom of the press. In his letter to G. Miasnikov, Lenin is adamant that "freedom of the press means in fact that the international bourgeoisie would immediately buy hundreds and thousands of cadet, Social Revolutionary, and Menshevik writers and organise their propaganda against us" (Lenin, 1964). For Lenin, "freedom of the press" is an anti-proletarian and therefore harmful concept because it cannot be controlled by the party. On the other hand, glasnost, whether "positive" or "negative," could be interpreted as a tool to educate proletariat and defeat the bourgeoisie. Thus, it is helpful to separate glasnost from freedom of the press, in the Leninist understanding. Glasnost is a policy, or a tool to regulate freedom of the press and to use it for party purposes. After Lenin's death, glasnost was restricted further and there was no place in the Soviet media for adequate representation of many problems, such as coverage of disasters, domestic crime, and mugging (McNair, 1991, p. 65).

Glasnost was revived as a central principle by Mikhail Gorbachev. Based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, Gorbachev's glasnost project had three main aspects to it: criticism, including self-criticism, access to information and socialist pluralism (ibid., p. 54).

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<sup>2</sup> И вот разлилась как море благодетельная гласность.... О, не верьте, не верьте, почтенные иноземцы, что мы боимся благодетельной гласности, только что завели — и испугались ее, и прячемся от нее.... Нет, мы любим гласность и ласкаем ее, как новорожденное дитя. Мы любим этого маленького бесенка, у которого только что прорезались его маленькие, крепкие и здоровые зубенки. Он иногда невпопад кусает; он еще не умеет кусать."



Gorbachev demanded “more openness about public affairs in every sphere of life,” more truth whether it is good and bad, with all the “contradictions” and “complexities.” He insisted that people need to know “what stands in the way of progress and what thwarts it.” He described “glasnost” as an “effective form of public control over the activities of all government bodies,” a “powerful lever in correcting shortcomings,” and “a way of accumulating the various diverse views and ideas which reflect the interests of all strata, of all trades and professions in Soviet society” (Gorbachev, 1987, pp. 75-78).

Gorbachev's glasnost changed the concept of newsworthiness. In the pre-glasnost USSR “... not events but social processes are treated as news and regarded as being newsworthy” (McNair, 1991, p.64). Live broadcasting, investigative journalism, and the adaptation of global news formats were among new features that changed the face of Soviet television for “television was more than the tool of glasnost. It was in fact synonymous with the policy” (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, p. 7). News programmes challenged and even shocked the viewer accustomed to the tediously repetitive stream of stories about Soviet achievements and the Party leadership.

Gorbachev's glasnost nevertheless had its limits too, it was not synonymous with freedom of the press. The glasnost debate was supposed to take place “under the auspices of the Party,” with the terms to be set by Lenin with Gorbachev (Ellis, 1999, p. 49). In line with the Leninist understanding, the “limits of glasnost were determined from the top and during the periods when political struggle intensified and officialdom felt its power threatened the authorities readily narrowed those limits”; there are many examples of television programmes being censored, such as *Glance (Vzgliad)* and *600 sec* (Androunas, 1993, p. 78, 91, 88). The recently published account of Gorbachev's glasnost from the perspective of a leading television producer, journalist and founder of *Glance*, Vladimir Mukusev, shows in detail that censorship was still the norm and many programmes found their way to the television screen only thanks to the journalists' and producers' inventiveness and persistence (Mukusev, 2007).

Neither did glasnost grow into freedom of the media in post-Soviet Russia. Yeltsin's epoch in the 1990s is associated with “decentralisation” and media wars when major media outlets were privatised by a group of oligarchs (Zassoursky, 2004, pp. 20-21). It was also the period of “black *piar*” (PR) and “*kompromat*”; the latter is defined as “discrediting information that can be collected, stored, traded, or used strategically across all domains” (Ledeneva, 2006, p. 58). The media played a crucial role in *kompromat* wars, as discrediting materials were prepaid and published in major media outlets. Mukusev describes how these informal practices damaged the profession of the journalist. In addition, Arutunyan points out: “Even after the law [which “placed registering a media outlet beyond the control of the Party”] was passed, at no time in Yeltsin's Russia did the media ever hold a “sacred” or untouchable” status” (Arutunyan, 2009, p. 125).

After Putin came to power, Russia was officially defined by international observers as “not free” and the framing of political debate became similar to that existing in the USSR (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, p. 29). The main television channels became state-controlled again: censorship and self-censorship as a result of the fear of being sacked, threatened or even murdered became pervasive (Azhgikhina, 2009, p. 17). On a national level freedom of the press shrank almost to the point of non-existence apart from a couple of liberal media outlets, including the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* and the newspaper *Novaia gazeta*, which remained free. The internet was the last bastion of freedom of expression in Putin’s Russia. However, it should be noted that despite all the Putin government’s efforts, the overall media situation was complicated by the appearance of western genres and reporting techniques, which had replaced old Soviet styles of reporting. The very medium of those new genres, such as live television, and the appearance of western media on the Russian market brought some openness and did not allow for complete control. Hence, in some semi-dormant form, glasnost has not left Russia since the advent of perestroika.

Medvedev’s article “Forward, Russia!” published online in *Gazeta.ru* on 10 September 2009 had a striking effect on the public. For the first time in years, the president openly criticised Russia’s many social and economic problems and argued that Russia would not be able to solve these problems without modernisation. Consequently, Medvedev presented his modernisation project in his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of Russian Federation. The impact of the article and the address was particularly remarkable because in Putin’s Russia such criticism of the current state of affairs could not have been conceived. Medvedev’s openness and his demand for transparency in the work of the government reminded many Russians of Gorbachev’s glasnost, and Medvedev’s modernisation project was seen in parallel with perestroika. Gorbachev’s glasnost also started from the top and had a centralising mission (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, p. 7). Thus, Medvedev brought glasnost back into media discourse.

In addition to the open debate that unravelled in response to Medvedev’s article online and in the press, on the eve of 2010 television viewers were surprised to see puppets representing Putin and Medvedev which danced and sang satirical verses as a duet in a popular Channel One variety show. The last time a puppet impersonating Putin appeared on the television screen in 2002, when the stinging satirical programme *Puppets (Kukly)*, a version of the British *Spitting Image*, was shut down because allegedly Putin did not like the way he was portrayed. A parallel again was made with Gorbachev’s glasnost, which focused on exposing social and economic ills and gave rise to open criticism and satire.

Moreover, a few months later on 5 March 2010 a well known satirist Mikhail Zadornov openly attacked the leading party, United Russia, affiliated with the Prime Minister Putin in his article “Metastases of United Russia” (2010), published in the widely popular newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets (MK)*. These examples of criticism and satire of the president, the Prime Minister, the leading party and their policies show that “the times

are changing,” as Viktor Shenderovich (2010) put it recently in his response to Zadornov's piece. Among others, Aleksei Pankin, a *The Moscow Times* media reporter, recently referred to the current state of affairs as a “dawn of a new period of glasnost.” In reference to the growing transparency of information, Yury Baturin also observes that the first sprouts of glasnost “that had been “seeded” 22 years ago” are now emerging (2010).

However, the view that glasnost is strengthening in Russia is not unanimous. For instance, Maksim Trudoliubov, a *Vedomosti* reporter, notes that in today's Russia there is “.. glasnost the other way around (*naoborot*).” Trudoliubov (2009) warns that the media have less freedom than they did under Gorbachev. Another concern is expressed by popular blogger Krig42 who, in his short interview to *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, is worried that Medvedev's appeal to governors to run their own blogs can lead to a pretend-glasnost, i.e. blogs would be run by governors' bureaucrats to “tick the box” (Kriviakina, 2010). In other words, both Trudoliubov and Krig42 are worried that glasnost in Medvedev's Russia does not aim to free the media but to use certain media channels, genres, and formats that are associated with transparency and freedom of the press, such as blogging, to create an *impression* of growing glasnost. This pretend-glasnost or “glasnost the other way around” is when certain discourses associated with glasnost and transparency are used as a political tool to control freedom of the speech. Paradoxically, this pretend-glasnost is opposite to glasnost proper and is intended to curtail freedom of speech instead of releasing it. Pretend-glasnost has its roots in the past. Both Lenin and Gorbachev, as discussed above, supported glasnost as it suited their party ideology setting the limits of what could be publicly discussed from the top. Glasnost was in fact opposed to freedom of speech as something controllable and manageable while freedom of speech would be seen as harmful and damaging.

To assess the presence of glasnost on Channel One, the following section examines a selection of Channel One news bulletins and identifies main protagonists, themes, and topics covered on the news, i.e. what is newsworthy on Channel One in 2010. Newsworthiness is directly related to glasnost. Before Gorbachev's glasnost, Soviet news bulletins informed viewers about social processes, which were seen as newsworthy. With the advent of glasnost, events took the place of processes.

## WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY IN MEDVEDEV'S RUSSIA?

To identify what is newsworthy in Medvedev's Russia, I have analysed news stories as they have been posted on the Channel One website for the period October 2009 to January 2010. Channel One news stories were chosen because the Channel One news bulletin *Vremia*

(*Time*) was the most popular news bulletin in Russia in 2009 including the period of research for this article.<sup>3</sup>

A quantitative analysis of news stories shows that the personality of the president Medvedev is the most newsworthy. Each month, between 60 to 95 news stories featuring Medvedev were encountered, excluding repetitions of the same story throughout the day or from slightly different angles. They were normally rather long: the longest ones were up to 4 or even 7 minutes. In news bulletins, these news stories are usually shown at the start of the bulletin. The president is customarily portrayed as the protagonist. An increasing interest in the representation of personality is a feature that developed in the Russian media under Putin, with the shaping of Putin's image not only as the leading political figure but as a celebrity (for instance, a special issue of a popular celebrity magazine was dedicated solely to Putin) (Tairbekova, 2008). Celebrity culture and portraying political leaders as celebrities has become a global trend which arrived in Russia along with globalisation. Since Medvedev launched his modernisation project he overtook Putin in the number of appearances on television and in the national press. Medvedev topped the list of the most-mentioned personalities in the Russian media in 2009, with 122,871 references, up from last year's 100,264 (Medvedev beats Putin, 2009). The Prime Minister Putin is not far behind, with 93,182 references in 2009, compared with 94,906 in 2008.

A common representational strategy used to present news stories about Medvedev to the nation almost daily involves televising his regular meetings with government officials in his Kremlin office. He and a member of the government are usually sitting opposite each other at the table, which is next to the president's desk (in a T shape). It is perhaps supposed to make the president look less imposing and more equal to the person in front of him. However, this is the only feature of this format that aims to imply equality. The rest looks grand and hierarchical. The office is decorated in a stately fashion, with the Official Standard of the President and the Flag of the Russian Federation behind the president's desk, gilded chairs and golden curtains. The president listens to the official's report, and gives his comments. The guest member of the government usually has a pile of papers in front of him or her. Sometimes there are two officials reporting at the same time. In this case, Medvedev sits at his desk. Body language reveals an obvious hierarchy in the interactions between the actors.

All these meetings are recorded in the same fashion: alternative close-ups of Medvedev, and his visitor(s), and shots from further away of both or all of them. For instance, on 25 December 2009 Medvedev met the Minister of Justice Aleksandr Kononov and the General Prosecutor Yury Chaika. Medvedev inquires about the system of justice; he

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<sup>3</sup>TSN rating data, retrieved 10 August, 2010, from <http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/tv/>

is shown to be involved in everything *personally*: he studies the laws himself and demands prompt changes to them (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/158234>). Another representative example is the president's meeting with the Minister of Emergency Situations, Sergei Shoigu on 27 December 2009 (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/158281>). This news story does not have an event to report on, as the minister simply gives a summary of his achievements in 2009, focusing on the positive results of the year (1700 lives were saved) and bypassing tragic events (such as the tragedy at the Perm nightclub *Lame Horse* (*Khromaia loshad'*)) in December 2009. The president congratulates the minister on his achievements. This story is reminiscent of the Soviet news format, when the focus of the story was processes rather than events.

However, events can also be the main focus of news stories, for instance, when the above mentioned tragedy happened in Perm, it was covered in great detail, with Medvedev and Putin personally involved in sorting out the situation along with Shoigu (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/157371>). Hence, my argument is that news stories in Medvedev's Russia can intermittently cover both events and processes as long as their main focus is on the personality of the president or the Prime Minister. There are stories that do not mention either of them but the sheer number of the stories that *do* and do it *without* questioning their policies is incomparable to any news channel in a western democracy.

A myth is constructed of a president who keeps omnipresent personal control over all spheres of government activities: health, education, security, economy, social, science and technology. For instance, in just one day (5 October 2009) he is shown to be leading debate regarding education and economic zones. In his Kremlin office, Medvedev meets the Minister of Economic Development, Elvira Nabiullina, to discuss transfer of responsibility for free economic zones to her ministry (1:14min) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/economic/152946>). On the same day, he also meets the best teachers of the country at the annual competition for the best teacher to discuss education (7:28 min, of which 5 min is dedicated to the meeting with the president) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/152939>). He personally supports the Unified National Examination (*Edinyi Eksamen*), shares his own experience of teaching in higher education, criticizes corruption and answers teachers' questions. This is a typical example of how events (teaching awards in this case) are often used to mythologize the president. With such a detailed record of Medvedev's movements, the national news bulletin turns into a diary of the president's daily activities broadcast for the nation.

To support the point further, it is instructive to analyse the news stories reported on the following day, 6 October 2009. Firstly, in his Kremlin office Medvedev meets the head of the Supreme Court, Vyacheslav Lebedev to discuss the examination that has to be passed to become a judge (1:16min) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/>

social/153026). Secondly, there is a story about the international forum on nanotechnology, which is presented as a story about Medvedev's support of nanotechnology (6:12min — 5 min of which is dedicated to Medvedev and his speech at the forum) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/techno/153021>). Thirdly, Medvedev meets the Head of the Accounts Chamber Sergei Stepashin to discuss banking and some issues related to alcohol production (1:13 min) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/economic/153011>).

Another important part of the myth about the president is that he is fully in charge of the situation, as the guarantor of successful implementation of his own orders. For instance, on 29 December 2009 Medvedev meets the Minister of Finance, Aleksei Kudrin, who is reporting on the budget of 2009 and plans for 2010 (1:33 min) (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/economic/158436>). Kudrin's report includes words key to the understanding of such meetings: "We have covered all social expenses from the budget, as you ordered, over the course of the whole year." Such reports on the implementation of the president's orders take place regularly, not only at the end of the calendar year.

Only one visitor to the president's office who is not shown to report to Medvedev is the Prime Minister Putin. The reports of Medvedev's meetings with Putin are usually brief, shorter than other reports. For example, one such meeting takes place on 30 October 2009 (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/economic/154632>). Only 30 sec of the 5.20 min news story is dedicated to the meeting of the Prime Minister with the President. The rest covers Putin's meeting with the leadership of the United Russia. This is an example of when the Putin story is given priority by placing it immediately after the report on the meeting of Medvedev with Putin. A similar meeting takes place on 7 October 2009, Putin's birthday (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/153113>). The report is the shortest of all — 13 sec.

Putin has been known for his assertive style of expression and his macho image. Medvedev's tone of voice, and his manner of speaking on the screen have also become firmer. For instance, on 25 December 2009 he presides at the meeting of the Commission on Modernisation and Technological Development in the headquarters of *Gazprom* (4:40min). Towards the end of this report, in response to Sergei Chemezov, Medvedev says: "No, you don't need to respond to what I have just said. What I said is not a comment but a verdict.... *You* have comments. Everything that I say is cast in granite" (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/158229>). And this is not intended as a joke! It is not surprising that it was soon parodied in *The Burden of the News (Bremia novostei)*, a satirical show on youtube.com. Another time, Medvedev rolls over his eyes to show his disappointment (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/158234>). These examples are peculiar because although Medvedev attempts to appear more assertive, he cannot always pull it off.

Another frequently used representational strategy is to show Medvedev taking part in various meetings with domestic and foreign officials, international leaders, and businessmen. He gives speeches at summits, conferences, international forums, and roundtables. He is also televised while visiting different parts of Russia and the world. Every official step of the President is recorded and subsequently covered on the national news. Some of these news stories (sometimes fuller versions of them) are also consequently posted on the Kremlin's website (<http://news.kremlin.ru/>), the president's personal website (<http://www.medvedev-da.ru/>), and his video-blog (<http://blog.kremlin.ru/>). On the latter, Medvedev invites members of the public to comment on his speeches, decisions, and policies. On 16 March 2010, the two most popular topics were "Counteracting Corruption" (4983 comments) and Medvedev's article "Forward, Russia!" (4896 comments). Many comments are challenging and stinging critical of the president's plans, intentions, and implementation. For instance, Andrei Shebanov from Tul'skaia oblast' writes on 14 March 2010 (<http://blog.kremlin.ru/theme/55?page=9>):

Modernisation at the expense of the people is immoral. For instance, new bulbs — 100 RBL each instead of 10 RBL, or the reform of housing and public utilities, which is reduced to the increasing of costs without their actual improvement — this is modernisation in the eyes of our bureaucrats.... It is a profanation and misuse of considerable budgetary means.

Among other popular topics, there is "The President's Address to the Federal Assembly" (2686 comments on 16 March 2010), which also contains some attacks on the President and his policies, such as an entry by V.A. Skroban of Krasnoiar'skii krai on 18 November 2009 (<http://blog.kremlin.ru/post/34?page=3>):

The president is persistently losing his authority in the country. This became evident after the Address [to the Federal Assembly]. It is obvious that it is impossible to solve this problem without a scalpel. For over ten years the Prime Minister had a free ride on rolling up oil prices having done almost nothing for developing industry. ... We urgently need a new Stolypin. Otherwise, Medvedev will become a swear word for many years to come.

The latter comment touches on the untouchable on television, i.e. the issue of the tensions and contradictions between Medvedev's policies and Putin's legacies. Online comments demonstrate a vast gap between the way Medvedev, his policies and actions are reported on national TV news and the range of feedback Medvedev receives on his official internet site. In the course of the four months that my research covers there is not a single news Channel One story involving Medvedev, in which his modernisation project would have been openly and sharply challenged. Channel One does not welcome the likes of

Jeremy Paxman, a British journalist, who is known for his rather aggressive style of interviewing. Even Medvedev's widely advertised interview with the heads of three main television channels Konstantin Ernst (Channel One), Oleg Dobrodeev (Director of VGTRK), and Vladimir Kulistikov (Director of NTV), which was broadcast on 27 December 2009, did not contain any really challenging questions (retrieved 20 March, 2010, from [www.1tv.ru/news/polit/158288](http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/158288)). Comparing journalists' questions regarding Medvedev's modernisation on television with ordinary citizens' postings on the same topic on the web including forums on various official websites, such as the president's own, shows a stark difference in two media spheres: what it is possible to say openly in online forums is still a taboo in a broadcast news bulletin. As a rule, the President or the Prime Minister could be challenged online even on the official websites including that of Channel One but not in a broadcast news bulletin on television. A tendency to produce one pro-government version of the news on television is still strong. The number of television bulletins which were relatively free of the government control, such as those of Ren-TV and Petersburg Channel 5, has recently shrunk. In 2010 the state-controlled channel Russia Today took over news production and programming at both Ren-TV and Petersburg Channel 5 (RT to Decide, 2009).

There is an additional complication in the way that news stories about the President and the Prime Minister are now produced by their two separate, specially accredited teams of journalists. From December 2009 Putin and Medvedev have had their own "pools of journalists who do not overlap." Commenting on this new development, Mikhail Vinogradov is convinced that this decreases transparency: "Journalists don't have an opportunity to compare the President and the Prime Minister, to ask questions to the President about the Prime Minister and the other way around... It is the issue of transparency of information, more precisely, of its lack. It is one thing when some image is being created, but it is a different matter when there is a tendency to close down information flows, not to allow any leaks of information and to minimise the role of journalists as outsiders."

To briefly summarise, on one hand, Channel One television news stories challenge neither the Kremlin, nor the President, nor the Prime Minister; they contain biased content in favour of the President and the government; journalists are chosen and directed in their coverage by government officials and have a strong sense of self-censorship. These features are not new and are mainly a legacy of Putin's era; in fact, they have been listed by Sarah Oates to describe the "neo-Soviet" model of the media under Putin (Oates, 2009, p. 52). These are also characteristics that suit the description of the media as a "lapdog" or at best "guard dog" rather than a "watchdog" where glasnost emerges in the speeches of the president and is used as a tool to control freedom of speech (Donohue, Tichenor & Olien, 1995). For instance, by talking about transparency, Medvedev allows it into the official discourse but when it comes down to practice the content of Channel One news bulletins is strictly controlled by the state. This is an example of pretend-glasnost.



However, glasnost proper, i.e. glasnost that opens a way to transparency and freedom of speech, has recently started to re-emerge in Russian public sphere via social media, youtube and even the television screen. The most prominent example is the discussion between Putin and Yury Shevchuk which took place at the charity event "Little Prince" on 30 May 2010 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kClbyM90Tns&feature=related>). The famous Russian rock star Shevchuk asked Putin some unexpected and provocative questions about oppositional marches and whether the government intended to let them take place, and then Shevchuk made comments on the lack of freedom of speech in contemporary Russia. Putin was taken aback and was caught by the cameras in a rather confused state. The video of this discussion immediately appeared on youtube and was also broadcast on main television channels including Channel One. However, the most engaging and broad discussion of this incident took place in the social media and on the oppositional radio stations *Ekho Moskvy* and *Radio Svoboda*. In retrospect, Shevchuk described his interaction with Putin as a manifestation of the long-lasting conflict between the artist and power/the tsar, giving examples from the past: Pushkin and Nicholas I, Karamzin and Alexander I (Kirilenko & Kulygin, 2010). If Shevchuk's comparison of himself with the great critics of the tsars in the past is correct, then freedom of speech is still considered to be the privilege of the artist, and an act of bravery, which paradoxically implies a lack of glasnost proper because the latter presupposes that freedom of speech is the norm and part of everyday reality. The next section examines to what extent questioning and criticism of the government has been present in programmes which according to the rules of their genre should aim to ridicule, i.e. satirical shows.

### SATIRE OR "PARODY ON SATIRE"?

How are news stories reflected upon in regular television and online satirical shows? Who and what are the targets of parody and satire? Satire is understood as "a mode of discourse or vision that asserts a polemical or critical outlook ("the satiric")" rather than a literary genre (Preminger & Brogan, 1933, p. 1114). Satire can employ parody as a rhetorical means, or "utilise parody as a strategy to achieve its critical ends," and this satire is referred to as "parodic satire," as Ryan-Hayes describes it (1995, p. 5). Both satire and parodic satire have existed in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia, not only in literature, as Ryan-Hayes shows, but also in the mass media and popular culture, although in somewhat limited form due to censorship. For instance, there is one popular Russian satirical magazine, *Krokodil* (Crocodile), which survived through Soviet and post-Soviet times, and is now published online (<http://www.krakadil.ru/>). In Soviet times, *Krokodil* often targeted the west, western capitalism, and some domestic problems that were sanctioned for criticism. In addition to printed satire, there has also been a tradition of stand-up comedians who are

known as “writers-satirists” in Soviet and post-Soviet times, such as Mikhail Zhvanetsky, and Mikhail Zadornov.

On television, the best post-Soviet political satire was produced by Shenderovich, the author of the two NTV popular shows *Puppets* (1994-2002) and *Itogo* (1996-2002). *All in All (Itogo)* was made in the tradition that was born in the Gorbachev glasnost: openness and transparency allowed for political satire and the parodic representation of leading political figures which was impossible in Soviet times. *All in All* mocked the weekly NTV news programme *Results (Itogi)* (1992-2003), presented by Evgenii Kiselev. Each *All in All* programme ironically commented on the events of the past week and parodied the presentation style of weekly news bulletins on NTV and ORT. *Puppets*, which ran weekly for 6 years before it was “closed down” in 2000, targeted leading Russian and foreign political figures, such as Boris Yeltsin, Mikhail Gorbachev, Egor Gaidar, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Bill Clinton, Saddam Hussein, and many others. The last programme portrayed the accession of Putin as an ugly dwarf having come to power with the help of the television fairy (the Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky) who made him look attractive on television. Then Shenderovich produced *Free Cheese (Besplatnyi syr)* on TVS channel, which was also closed, and eventually he found place for a similar show called *Processed Cheese (Plavlenyi syrok)* on *Echo Moskvy* which went on air until 2008 (<http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/video/510682-echo/>).<sup>4</sup> Even after the closure of his previous shows, Shenderovich continued to target Putin and other leading political leaders.

In Putin's Russia, as seen from the case of Shenderovich, political satire was squeezed out of the mass media and flourished on the internet, being the only media space left for free expression. For instance, <http://www.karikatura.ru> is full of political satire and parodic representations of Medvedev and Putin. Another website containing examples of visual political satire is <http://www.youtube.com>. For instance, there is an ongoing satirical series *The Burden of the News (Bremia novostei)* produced by Ernst and Co., whose instalments (each approximately between 4min 30sec and 5 min 30sec) are broadcast regularly: there have been over 40 of them posted on youtube by 2 September 2010. The programme echoes Shenderovich's style in its parodic representation of news programmes: it mocks not only *Time* but other news bulletins produced in the same pro-government style. The title of the satirical show is a pun on *News Time (Vremia novostei)*. The programme attacks the corrupt government, ineffective leadership provided by the tandem of Putin and Medvedev, Medvedev's incapacity for making independent decisions and his “liberal” image. *The Burden* bulletins are created by editing and juxtaposing episodes from recent *Time* bulletins next to cut-outs from popular Soviet and post-Soviet films and cartoons, which provide

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<sup>4</sup>See Ryazanova-Clarke's (2008) discussion on the satirical counter-discourse of *Processed Cheese*.

stinging satirical commentary on current events (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-Le5GDOL1s> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Affmi7fxUaI&feature=related>). The popularity of *The Burden* has fluctuated: issue 2 has had 33,291 viewings ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_B19nxSV6A&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_B19nxSV6A&feature=related)); issue 11 — 2,449 viewings (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc7hF6KOtZc&feature=related>); issue 41 — 8,994 viewings, issue 42 — 8,439 viewing (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp57OIS6cXs&feature=related>). Some viewers leave comments which are mainly supportive and acknowledge the importance of satire of the government. For instance, a comment left by aegis20002 left 6 months ago: “An excellent alternative to the news of the puppet mass media” (retrieved 2 September, 2010, from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_B19nxSV6A&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_B19nxSV6A&feature=related)).<sup>5</sup>

One of the frequently quoted characters of *The Burden* is Sharikov from the Soviet film *The Heart of a Dog* (*Sobach'e serdtse*) (Vladimir Bortko, 1988) based on Mikhail Bulgakov's story published under the same title. In *The Burden* Sharikov has been compared with Medvedev since the President's inauguration. In Bulgakov's story, Sharikov used to be a dog, operated in order to turn him into a human being as an experiment by Prof. Preobrazhensky. The parallel is made with Medvedev, in that he was picked by Putin to become President as an experiment. Before Sharikov and Medvedev have been fully integrated into their new roles they need to be looked after by their masters. In more recent editions, Medvedev is mocked for his Putinesque discursive practices. For instance the edition 39 pokes fun at him for saying that his words “will be cast in granite” (see the section above; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o8\\_4Ue94ao](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o8_4Ue94ao)). Edition 38 summarised the results of the government's work in 2009 by portraying a completely discredited government that has “neither brains, nor conscience. Just gobbling it all down” (*Ni mozgov, ni sovesti... Tol'ko zhrut*) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Affmi7fxUaI&NR=1>).

Are there equivalent satirical shows emerging on popular TV channels? One of the most popular satirical shows currently shown on Channel One is *Thespotlightofparishilton* (*Prozhektorperishilton*). It first went on air on 17 May 2008, ten days after Medvedev's inauguration. In two consecutive years, 2008 and 2009, it won two TEFI awards for the best information-entertainment show. There are four presenters — Ivan Urgant, Garik Martirosian, Sergei Svetlakov, Aleksandr Tsekalo — all popular comedians or actors. They explain that the title of the programme is a reference to *The Spotlight of Perestroika*, a renowned glasnost programme, which exposed many social, economic and political ills of the day. *Thespotlightofparishilton* (*Thespotlight*) aims to reflect ironically on today's Russia, symbolised by the emptiness of the celebrity It-girl, Paris Hilton. Four presenters sit at a table in a studio, mimicking the atmosphere of the Russian kitchen conversation format, with

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<sup>5</sup>Отличная альтернатива новостям марионеточных СМИ.

a teapot and biscuits in front of them, and mock the press of the past week. The format borrows from the BBC2 show *Mock the Week*. One by one the four presenters pick a piece of the news, read it to the public and comment on it. They claim that most jokes are spontaneous, although some of them have obviously been prepared. The presenters circle or highlight the bits of the news they would like to discuss in the studio in advance. In addition, they usually have one or two guests who join them half way through the show and at the end of the programme they all play different musical instruments and sing a song together.

So, if the format — a weekly mocking commentary on the news — is similar to Shenderovich's satirical programmes, the topics and approach to them are different. *Thespotlight* tends to pick on topics that are popular and safe in the Russian context. For instance, on 21 November 2009, while commenting on the President's Address to the Federal Assembly, they touched on the topics that Medvedev himself criticised, and they echoed his criticism with their agreeable joking about corruption and education. Instead of satirising the corrupt government itself, as *The Burden of the News* does, they satirised corruption that Medvedev had criticised in his speech. The presenters also made jokes about the President's suggestion to decrease the number of time zones. It needs to be said that by the time the show was aired this already became the journalists' favourite topic for jokes. They laughed at the expense of those members of the Assembly who did not like Medvedev's plan for modernisation (<http://www.1tv.ru/sp/si=5745&fi=2475>). In other words, *Thespotlight* mostly satirises those phenomena that the president himself has sanctioned.

However, *Thespotlight* is not always so polite and friendly; it can also be rude, politically incorrect and simply embarrassing. The edition broadcast on 27 October 2010 in which it mocked the results of the Winter Olympics 2010 began with jokes at the expense of Russian functionaries partying hard in the Russian House in Canada instead of supporting Russian sportsmen. Then, presenters continued by making degrading and homophobic jokes at the expense of the US ice figure skater who won the gold medal (<http://www.1tv.ru/sp/si=5745&fi=3441>). Another favourite topic is the "assigned enemies" of Russia, as Leonid Radzikhovskii put it on Ekho Moskv, such as Yushchenko and Saakashvili (*Osoboe mnenie Leonida*, 2010). Satire becomes a tool of political oppression, an extension of the government's policy, or an aspect of "soft power" against the state's enemies.

An analysis of the characters mocked in the more recent *Animated Personality* supports Radzikhovskii's conclusion about *Thespotlight*, except that in addition to the established foreign "enemies" there are also domestic easy targets. The first issue of *Animated Personality* came out on 15 November 2009. Among the first personalities satirised there were the footballer Andrei Arshavin (mocked for his naiveté), the manager of the Russian national football team, Guus Hiddink, the television personalities Vladimir Pozner, Tina Kandelaki, and Anastasia Volochkova (her shallow nature and vanity), foreign

politicians Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton (flirting with Lavrov on the phone), Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko (his political intrigues over the gas pipeline), and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Sergei Lavrov, the popular singer Alla Pugacheva and TV presenter Maksim Galkin (behaving like Pugacheva's naughty child rather than her partner). Apart from Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov, all other political figures are from other neighbouring or Western countries. However, no jokes were made at the expense of Lavrov; his figure was used to mock Hillary Clinton: her present to Lavrov, a button to reset the Russia-USA relations is thrown away by the Russian minister (<http://www.1tv.ru/static/pr=6619&pi=6621>). In the following issues of the programme, new personalities were added including the billionaire Roman Abramovich, the comedian Evgenii Petrosian, the film director Nikita Mikhalkov, the television celebrity Kseniia Sobchak, the singer Nikolai Baskov (<http://www.1tv.ru/static/pr=6619&pi=6676>).

The satire targets football, pop music television, and foreign politics. Often jokes are made at the expense of foreign political leaders and play on Russian nationalism, post-imperial sentiment and patriotism, including anti-American, anti-Georgian, anti-Ukrainian and anti-Belarusian sentiments. For instance, the theme of weak Ukrainian leadership is very popular. In the second issue, Timoshenko is knitting a scarf with the US flag for Obama's children, so that they would fight over it and want her to make more.

Between the end of December and the beginning of January *Animated Personality* moved from the 8<sup>th</sup> most popular programme to the 3<sup>rd</sup> place. This was a result of the appearance of new puppets — the duo of Putin and Medvedev. "The 30-minute episode broadcast on New Year's Eve showed Putin and Medvedev dancing in the style of Soviet-era stand-up comedians, with Medvedev playing a harmonica and Putin shaking a tambourine and slapping it from time to time on his bottom. The two sing mockingly about Nabucco, the Western-supported pipeline that would bypass Russia to deliver Central Asian gas to Western Europe through Turkey, and President Viktor Yushchenko and his political problems in Ukraine, which votes in a presidential election on Sunday. The dancing duo also sing about Pikalyovo, the Leningrad region town where Putin intervened to curb angry workers' protests in May, GM's decision to cancel the sale of Opel to Sberbank, and corrupt bureaucrats," as Braterskii (2010) describes it.

Jokes in the episodes following the New Year's Eve one became even more evidently pro-government and pro-Putin. In the fourth episode, at the summit in Copenhagen, Berlusconi is mocked for sexually explicit behaviour, Saakashvili, Yushchenko and Lukashenko are satirised as the representatives of poorer countries that try to make money by selling what they have to richer countries (flowers, fat, and a tractor). Lukashenko is presented as a stupid person: he is taking part in the Russian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* On the other hand, Putin and Medvedev are elevated by being portrayed as strong leaders of the country Lukashenko wants to be friends with. When Lukashenko needs help with his final question worth three million he asks the presenter to call Putin because

when he calls himself, he explains, Putin does not answer the phone. Shortly afterwards, Medvedev is shown in his limousine with Lukashenko, and the latter refuses to get out of his car. Interestingly, episodes featuring Yulia Timoshenko and Aleksandr Lukashenko are among the most popular, for instance two of them have been viewed 427,752 and 232,476 times respectively. In comparison, the New Year episode with Putin and Medvedev's singing *chastushki* was viewed a fewer number of times: 151,401 (retrieved 23 March, 2010, from [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%82+%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8&aq=f](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%82+%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8&aq=f) ).

In another episode, Putin is portrayed as the one receiving presents from various political leaders. Obama brings Putin a present made by Malaysian workers, so the USA is mocked for exploiting cheap labour in the third world countries. Yushchenko comes without a present and Putin tells him a poem, which finishes with "Your light has cut out. This is one. You will start using wood. Two. You will be in debt. Three." Lukashenko gives the Russian leaders a petrol-saw (*benzopila*) *Druzhiba* (Friendship) which he stole (<http://www.1tv.ru/static/pr=6619&pi=6765>). Putin is represented as the leader who is being bribed by those in weaker positions. It is for this elevation of Putin in a programme which by definition should attack those in position of power Shenderovich criticized it as "a parody on satire. ... This is *Piar* trying to act as a satire. This is the most disgusting thing possible" (Osoboe mnenie Viktora, 2010).

To sum up, my comparative analysis of satirical shows on Channel One and on youtube shows that sharp video political satire directed at the leading Russian politicians including Medvedev and Putin does exist and can be found primarily on youtube. The satirical shows broadcast on Channel One, on the other hand, can be described rather as "parody on satire."

## CONCLUSION

Gorbachev described glasnost as a path to openness and freedom of speech, but he also used it as a tool subordinate to perestroika, a means of attacking his opponents. Here there is a direct parallel with Medvedev who uses it as a tool subordinate to his modernisation project, a means of positioning himself as a liberal leader, and an instrument that helps him in his fight against political opponents. This is pretend-glasnost. The discourses of pretend-glasnost have filled government-controlled television channels and official websites. They create an *illusion* of glasnost and transparency. A closer look at the content of television programmes shows mostly a lack of glasnost proper, with some glimpses of freedom of speech as in the case of Shevchuk's discussion with Putin. However, those cases are still rare on the national television screen. Pretend-glasnost, or "glasnost the other way around," can

be described as a parody on glasnost similar to the way Shenderovich characterised the state of satire on Channel One as a “parody on satire.” Political satire can prosper only in the conditions of freedom of speech. As soon as it is under pressure from those in power, it loses its stinging directness and turns into either *stiob* (defined in the next paper within this special issue), or a “parody on satire.” The presence of satire on youtube and its lack on Channel One well illustrates the situation with openness and freedom of speech in Medvedev's Russia.

A clash between glasnost proper and pretend-glasnost creates tensions in public discourses. There is a danger that pretend-glasnost can discredit glasnost proper in the same way as “democracy” was, to a great extent, discredited in Russian public discourse. Since Yeltsin's time, democracy has become associated with lack of law and general chaos. On the other hand, the steadily growing use of the internet in Russia provides people with the opportunity to exercise freedom of speech on a regular basis. One of the recent manifestations of this was an anti-Putin protest. On 10 March 2010, an anti-Putin appeal was published on the internet <http://putinavotstavku.ru/> (Albats, 2010). Would social media and youtube help glasnost to pour out like a sea, in Dostoevsky's words, onto the television screen and the mass media or would pretend-glasnost fill internet platforms, as some internet users have predicted? These are questions for future articles.

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# SEXUAL EXCESS IN RUSSIA'S EUROVISION PERFORMANCES AS A NATION BRANDING TOOL

GALINA MIAZHEVICH

*The article focuses on the annual media event that is the Eurovision Song Contest. The festival of Eurovision, as the current heated debate about its relevance, nature and essence reveals, is an important phenomenon in the cultural life of contemporary Europe. The annual cycle of preparation for, and participation in, Eurovision is a useful lens for examining the "branding" of the contributing nations. The article investigates how recent transformations of sexuality demonstrated at Eurovision by Russia shape the reconstruction of the boundaries of taste of this post-Soviet nation, and how this in turn enables it to reconfigure its own position within the New Europe. It is argued that the sexual excess displayed in several Russian performances can be read in terms of an implicit dialogue with West European constructions of "bad taste" and the emergent notion of Euro-trash.*

**Keywords:** Eurovision, Russia, nation, branding, excess, sexuality, kitsch

The Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is an annual ritual in the cultural life of contemporary Europe. This article adopts a particular perspective on ESC, treating it above all as an interesting lens for examining the branding of the participating nations, whether they are former Soviet Union (fSU) states dealing with an unfinished nation-building process,

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Western counterparts<sup>1</sup> struggling with the re-conceptualization of Europeanness in the light of increased migratory flows, or newly welcomed EU members with rapidly growing diaspora communities from within and beyond Europe. My overarching concern is to determine what Russia's recent immersion in the culture of "Euro-taste" (or rather Euro-trash<sup>2</sup>) can tell us about emerging post-Soviet nation-branding strategies.

Post-Soviet attempts to engage with the culture of sexual and aesthetic excess characteristic of Eurovision are in fact twofold. On one hand, they involve *intra-cultural* dialogue: the performers mediate, for example, between state delineations of the limits of the sexually permissible (recent prohibitions on the Gay Pride parade in Russia, which are continuous with the Soviet practice of criminalizing homosexuality, indicate the harsh rigidity of those limits and the inherited tendency to treat homosexuality as non-normative) and popular, grassroots currents within which sexual "deviance" and excess are openly explored. The sexual excess of Russian ESC performances constitutes a bridge between rigid, official conceptions of the national self and more fluid, non-mainstream identities.

On the other hand, there are strong *intercultural and transnational* aspects to post-Soviet engagements with Eurovision. It is these which form the primary focus of my attention. Here excessive sexuality can be read in terms of an implicit dialogue with West European constructions of "bad taste" and the emergent notion of Euro-trash. In this context, post-Soviet Eurovision performances are treated as a "double voiced" act which self-consciously parody Western imaginings of an exotic, yet sexually promiscuous East (hence the frequent inclusion of ethnic "pastiche" alongside sexual excess). Thus, Russian Eurovision weaves between external and internal "Others," providing a rhetoric within which the counter-cultural aspects of Westernization can be synthesized with a nostalgic "Sovietness." Meanwhile, the carnivalesque orientation of ESC renders various Others less "frightening," teasing the television audience with a glimpse into an "utterly unknown," its radical alterity accordingly disarmed" (Allatson 2007, p. 94).

I begin by outlining the dilemmas of post-Soviet nation branding and the ESC's role as a "media spectacle" (Baker, 2008), which contributes to the re-conceptualization of the national myth. By interpreting the notion of "excess" as involving the deliberate breaching of the norms of "good taste" and "kitsch aesthetics" and as precluding single "readings" or definitions of the cultural phenomenon it mimics, I link Eurovision with a challenge to conventional nationhood which, however, is capable of renewing it. After presenting my

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<sup>1</sup>Although *Western* European countries are referred to as a unified "collective," the article acknowledges the limitations implicit in this generalization and cautions against treating the "West" as a homogenous whole.

<sup>2</sup>This notion includes European cultural phenomena masquerading as avant-garde high art; a type of entertainment associated with continental Europe emulating high cultural forms, but perceived to be of low quality, etc.

methodology, I examine the Eurovision contest over the last seven years (2003-2009). Within this period, I focus on Russia, which has participated in the final round of the contest since 2001 and which hosted the event in 2009. My analysis highlights the type of imagery foregrounded in the performances and the sexual demeanor of the artists focusing on those elements of the show which can be treated as “sexually excessive.” This, in turn, is linked to Russia’s (re)conceptions of Euro-taste/Euro-trash and its place in the New Europe.

## POST-SOVIET NATION BRANDING AND EUROVISION

### Post-Soviet Nation Branding, Media and Intercultural Dialogue

It is important to stress the extent to which the media, which function both as a “scheme of interpretation” and a “scheme of orientation” for members of a society (Webb, 2007), are involved in the re-conceptualization of post-Soviet nationhood. However, my focus is more on *nation-branding* (the creation of a brand for an external/foreign audience), than on traditional nation-building (the shaping of a nation’s shared memories and the construction of “imagined communities”) (Anderson, 1991). Nation-branding, I argue, provides a more appropriate perspective for my research inquiry since it takes account of the changing role of national governments in an internationalized environment, the shifting loyalties of today’s increasingly globalized citizens and other changes related to nationhood as discussed by Coleman (2008). I draw attention to media representations of a “new” post-Soviet national brand in both its interspatial (inter/trans/national) and inter-temporal (post/Soviet) dimensions.

The search of the post-Soviet nations for a place in the New Europe involves multiple inter-cultural themes. These include modernization/Europeanization, New Cold War discourse and the articulation of regional identities. The flow of meanings within the European mediascape also has an intercontinental (transnational) dimension. National media cultures responding to the shifts in the European discursive (and political) order reposition themselves in relation to another reference point: the USA. As we shall see, this is apparent in Russia’s Eurovision entry in 2005.

The intra- and inter-cultural dimensions become entangled at the point when cultural memory involving the recent Soviet past is utilized to accommodate the reflective or “ironic nostalgia” (Boym, 1994, pp. 290-291) of the local population and of displaced (e.g. Russian-speaking) diasporas elsewhere. Moreover various post-Soviet selves vie with one another as each country feels the need to re-authenticate the dominance of its own version of the post-Soviet narrative. There are corresponding mutations in the identity of the “Other” which divides into internal (e.g. the Jew in Russian culture) and external, negative and positive variants, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. Thus, the homosexual

“Other” at the heart of the Russian self can be associated with the relatively positive pre-revolutionary tradition of the “suffering soul” (or “suffering artist”) displaying “*smirenje*,” or with the negative external image of the “global gay” (Baer, 2009, p.15).

The Russian media play an important role in the dynamic interplay of multiple others, internal and external, contributing to the revitalization of the Russian cultural system (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009). Thus, although the ESC is primarily an arena in which various national narratives intersect, providing fruitful ground for investigating the flow and counter flow of nation branding discourses (especially in light of the competition’s Eastward expansion), the importance of the internal/eternal dynamic cannot be ignored.

### Eurovision Song Contest and Nation-branding

Since 1956 the ESC has survived constantly changing national borders, cultural landscapes, generational affiliations and media forms. Promoted by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) as a mean of fostering pan-European identity, it grew from a core of West European countries to include participants from the New Europe.<sup>3</sup> Now it is broadcast not only in the participating countries, but in other non/European<sup>4</sup> non-participating states. It is also available to a wide online audience (via its official website, youtube videos, etc.). Broad estimates are made during the live TV final, when votes from all 42 participating states are received via telephone calls and text messages.<sup>5</sup> These are combined with the judgments of professional juries. After the results have been merged, the country with the highest number of points wins and hosts the next year’s event. Although the legitimacy of the voting procedure has been criticized (Bakker, 2008), the popularity of Eurovision as a European media event sustains its importance for the construction of national selves.

The nation-branding function of the contest must be placed in the context of the aforementioned relationship between intra- and inter-cultural elements. First, the internationally broadcast final is preceded by multiple national competitions. Here, the intra-cultural element comes into its own as official and popular cultures collide. Although, the precise role of officialdom in each participating country is unclear, there is no question that “the contours and gradients of the [festival] have been filtered through an official lens” (Coleman, 2008, p.132). But equally important is the need to gain the mass support of the national public and to demonstrate to audiences, domestic and foreign alike that the singer

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<sup>3</sup>For more detailed description of the contest structure, see Bolin, 2006; Baker, 2008; Dekker, 2007.

<sup>4</sup>The only non-European country permitted to participate in the competition is Turkey.

<sup>5</sup>They are allowed to vote up to 20 times, but they cannot vote for their own country.

is not a protégé of the state or of a particular channel but a performer “chosen by popular assent.”

Recently the culmination to the event has been extended by several days as the semi-finalists compete for a place in the final.<sup>6</sup> The final itself unifies a European public dispersed across many nations, transporting viewers to a single symbolic centre, specially constructed to correspond to the place where the event is hosted (Bolin, 2006, p. 202). Although everyone watches the same performance, the show is individually mediated by the national TV commentators, who “function as national anchorage for the musical and visual text” (ibid, p. 203), providing a vital local contextualization of this large-scale trans-national media event. One of the most famous examples is the ironic commentary of Britain’s Terry Wogan (Le Guern, 2000; Coleman, 2008). Wogan articulates British scorn for the cult of Euro-trash but also a broader, and growing, West European tendency towards distanced critique of an ESC in which the New European participants now set the trend.

Despite the longstanding tradition of the ESC and its growing popularity, there is a surprising lack of academic research on the event and phenomena related to it.<sup>7</sup> Existing scholarly inquiry is limited to (predominantly) quantitative analysis of language choice for the lyrics or/and the voting procedure as indicators of pan-European identity building (Le Guern, 2000; Dekker, 2007). Further strands of analysis present the ESC as an “annual celebration of ephemerality” (Coleman, 2008, p.128) and a site for the public representation of various nations (Baker, 2008). Most of this work draws on Eurovision as seen from a West European standpoint. In this article I turn to the New Europe, exploring ESC as a platform for the negotiation of a single national brand: that of Russia. I shall argue that, through their manipulation of class, gender, sexual and ethnic stereotypes, and by exploiting a *kitsch* idiom, Russian performances strive to articulate a European nationhood, which simultaneously stakes a position among other states of the former Soviet Union and re-conceptualizes relationships with the shared Soviet past. First, however, I turn to the culture of ESC more generally, and to issues surrounding the construction of taste.

## Euro-trash

While a number of ESC participants became widely known and best-selling performers (ABBA, Julio Iglesias, Celine Dion, etc.), the event’s aesthetic status has been open to question for some time. The ESC has acquired the label of “stupid and disgusting

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<sup>6</sup>The structure of the contest is such that several countries (Britain, France, Germany or Spain) are guaranteed a place, while the participation of other countries is determined by the previous years’ scores.

<sup>7</sup>There are some exceptions, including set of articles published in a special issue of *Popular Communication* (2008) and a book by Raykoff and Tobin (2007).

Euro-trash,” an insult endorsed by many academics and media figures (Allatson, 2007; Le Guern, 2000; Holmwood, 2009; Stack, 2009). But Eurovision’s propensity to exceed the bounds of “good taste” should be contextualized. First, in light of the ESC’s increasingly templated format (romantic English language lyrics, pre-recorded music; standardized camera work and stage arrangements, etc.) the participants are limited in the creative techniques available to them. Resorting to sexual and aesthetic excess is an obvious response to such limitations. Secondly, the culture of bad taste provides a recognizable idiom within which participating states can position themselves in relationship to the rest of Europe, whether aligning themselves with it, or distinguishing themselves from it.<sup>8</sup> In other words, “Euro-trash” is a tool with which to delineate the imaginary boundaries of the continent. By promoting a certain, “knowing” mode of excess, *Western* European entries strive to maintain a coherent version of a privileged European space, to which others are implicitly forbidden entry. More specifically, Euro-trash can be deployed as a gesture of condescension or even contempt towards the “Other” Europe, which, in turn is learning to master the language of Euro-Trash in order to “catch up” with and mimic its “elder brothers.”

As a primary form of excess, kitsch, it has been argued, has assumed the role of the ESC’s “governing aesthetics and imaginary” (Allatson, 2007, p.87). According to Broch (1968, p. 49) kitsch is “a systematic falsehood, a thing or style or form of bad taste used by “kitsch-man” in order to recognize and reinforce his [sic] own “counterfeit” nature” (as in Allatson, 2007, p. 88). Likewise, as an imitation of the emotive *effects of art*, which knows its own status as imitation (Boym, 1994, p.16), the mechanism of kitschification lies at the root of the appeal of the ESC. For, on one hand, kitsch is deliberately set up in contrast with high culture/art/authenticity/uniqueness/endurance/etc. as a means of helping true art to struggle against formlessness and disintegration by clearly distinguishing itself from its nemesis. On the other hand, however, faced with a modern “crisis of cultural consensus,” the “postmodern reclamation of kitsch” (Allatson, 2007) enables genuine artists openly to embrace the elusive nature of aesthetic value with its now countless mutations. The mocking imitation of high cultural forms is in this light merely an acknowledgement of the collapse of aesthetic consensus.

But the startling historical transformation of the culture of bad taste (“banality,” “cliché,” “kitsch”) can mean different things in different national contexts. For example, “a countercultural discourse in one part of the world can turn into officialese in the other” (Boym, 1994, p. 11, 19). After the disintegration of the USSR the West’s ambivalent/ironic celebration of the “psychopathology of affluence” (ibid, p. 19) gradually entered the lexicon

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<sup>8</sup>The conventions of bad taste displayed at Eurovision are similar to the ones adopted by the “public” taste’s TV series “Eurotrash” and its presenter, whose manners are a self-conscious parody manifested in a skilful utilization of British stereotypical perception of a “stupid” Frenchman.

of post-totalitarian daily life. It did so, however, alongside and in response to a process of re-familiarization with the cultural monuments of the oppressive Soviet past (Allatson, 2007, p. 95). Kitsch can accommodate, and mediate between, both processes but in a culturally specific form. It is here that the non-translatable Russian notion of *stiob* becomes pertinent. According to Aleksei Yurchak *stiob*, which dates from the late Soviet period, is a “form of irony that differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision, or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humor” (2006, p. 250). It is similar to Bakhtinian “carnival” (1981), with one exception — this form of resistance is not a carnivalesque parody, as “it cannot be understood simply as a form of resistance to authoritative symbols because it also involves a feeling of affinity or warmth towards them.”

*Stiob* featured prominently in late Soviet Estrada and in the current Russian pop scene. Like *stiob*, Estrada is a peculiar Soviet phenomenon and is defined as “a wide-ranging term that includes pop music but also applies to modern dance, comedy, circus art, and many other performance not on the “big,” classical stage” (MacFadyen, 2002, p. 3). Although the canons of Estrada have been transformed, the two main features of the phenomenon — the multiplicity of the genres it favors, and the merging of high and low cultures it accomplishes — are preserved within the post-Soviet entertainment industry. The contemporary borrowing of elements of artistic expression from the Soviet era and the experimentation with Soviet (and even pre-Soviet) tradition is usually carried out in self-ironical mode. Herein lies its affinity with *stiob*. Some recent examples of *stiob* in contemporary post-Soviet pop culture include Verka Serdutchka, the now disbanded “Piatnizza” (Ukraine) and the Russian group “Uma Turman.”

Having set the scene and provided an overview of the attributes of the post-Soviet pop scene, focusing on the specificities of its relationship with the culture of Euro-trash, I now proceed to my analysis of Russian Eurovision performances.

## METHODOLOGY

The “success” of the new post-Soviet states in promoting their national identities within Eurovision and claiming their place in European space is largely dependant on their mastery of the relevant cultural technologies. However, this process is not without hurdles. In mapping itself onto European media space, each participating country needs to assert and maintain its unique identity, modulating between a stance of proximity and one of distance (Le Guern, 2000). With their newly emergent sense of self, and the array of alternatively threatening and appealing external “Others” confronting them, post-Soviet countries endure a particular struggle to maintain a balance between the two stances and the competing requirements associated with each. I frame my analysis with these requirements in mind, focusing on the following themes 1) the kind of imagery and style of performance



characterizing the acts; 2) the aspects of collective memory brought to bear on them; 3) the significance of the latter for the emergent post-Soviet Selves that the acts represent.

I do not deal with differences in the television commentaries accompanying the various national Eurovision broadcasts. My study attempts to (a) specify what constitutes trash within each act (with reference to dress, gesture, sexual demeanor, music, appeal to ethnic symbols, etc.) and (b) determine the tenor and mode of its treatment (whether it constitutes self-conscious celebration, parody, kitsch or *stio*b). I will also trace the influence of Soviet imagery (identifying symbols and their likely significations) as well as the exploitation of the Estrada format (with its combination of pop culture and high art) within performances displaying, for instance, an overstated homosexual eroticism. Cultural meaning in my analysis is situated neither in the production, nor in the dissemination, nor in the consumption of the ESC. Rather, it is theorized as an unstable phenomenon whose migration across all three processes is conditioned by a hegemonic framework in which dominant, official culture is continuously fragmented and destabilized through its interactions with popular culture.

I choose to concentrate on Russia as one of the few Eastern European states, which has repeatedly qualified for the final round of ESC since 2001, and which hosted the event in 2009. Moreover, its relationship with European identity presents particularly interesting challenges owing to its status as the principle European “Other.” The situation is further complicated by Russia’s status as a nation still emerging from the Soviet period and still in the throes of coming to terms with an entirely new sense of nationhood (the rise of ethnic nationalism in Russia is explicable in this context). I touch upon all of these issues in my reading of key Russian Eurovision performances.

## EXCESSIVE SEXUALITY AND NATION BRANDING: RUSSIAN EUROVISION ENTRIES

My analysis is restricted to the years 2003-2009 and within that period I will focus more closely on two acts — that of the group t.A.T.u (2003) and that of Dima Bilan (2008). I shall refer to other performances where appropriate.

### Packaging Russia for the external “Other” or “lesbian pop” of t.A.T.u in 2003

The first case of interest is Russia’s Eurovision entry for 2003, which featured the allegedly lesbian pop duet t.A.T.u. The band gained popularity in Russia as early as 1999 imitating non-normative sexual practices (which included kissing during their performances) stirring controversy at home and lurid fascination within Western audiences. Despite the decidedly mixed reception that the group encountered in Russia, homophobia was not

particularly prominent amongst the group's domestic critics. The girls did not hesitate to distance themselves from homosexuality, asserting that they were inspired by the "strategic fluidity of Russian sexuality" (Heller, 2007, p. 208), and playing primarily on the sexual fantasies of heterosexual men. The girls, moreover, claimed that they were using a form of "counter-sexuality" to stand up for freedom of expression and against "conformism." This has been compared to other adolescent emancipation and rebellion strategies (Rygina, 2004). Above all, however, it was a commercial ploy, which tested the limits of societal acceptability by taking "the continuing sexualisation of the music business to its next logical step" (Bruce, 2003).

t.A.T.u as a music project signified the commercialization of sexual discourse in Russia. Its deliberate sensationalism produced a cultural disorientation similar to that experienced in Russia in the early 1990s when pornographic literature flooded the national market. At the same time, the group occupied distinct niches within global pop culture. Their provocative image resonated beyond Russian borders with conflicting consequences: empowering gay audiences, yet provoking homophobic attitudes; challenging western "political correctness" yet enraging conservatives who linked their project to the pedophile market.

The "bad taste" embraced by t.A.T.u's Eurovision act had both intracultural and intercultural dimensions. The group's overstated variant of homosexuality (which was in line with the Western Euro-trash formula) brought confusion to the national cultural arena. First of all, their claim to represent a nation, whose cultural identity is traditionally associated with Orthodox conservatism, clashed sharply with an image based on selling same-sex eroticism. Secondly, their invocation of the discourse of emancipation — both in sexual terms, and in the related sense that that they were engaged in a "post-Soviet reclamation of the 'private' (non-socialist) body" — contrasted with the exploitation they encountered on the part of the producer (the girls had little autonomy on the business side) and the state. Rather like Soviet management of female athletes, the group performed a gendered labor on behalf of the state. As Heller puts it, the group was at "the juncture of Russia's commercial reclamation of erotic discourse and its international marketing of femininity, sexuality and nation" (2007, pp. 204-205).

As an exception to the Eurovision rule, t.A.T.u's act paid little attention to visual presentation. Instead, like many Russian entries, it placed a strong emphasis on lyrics. The refrain of the t.A.T.u. song is derived from a Russian prison saying "Don't trust, don't fear (don't beg)" which has both popular and high art connotations. It entered Russian mainstream culture thanks to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who mentioned it in his *The Gulag Archipelago*. The group's choice to sing in Russian represented a bold gesturing towards cultural sovereignty and the primacy of the domestic audience. This deviation from the Eurovision norm and the girls' general non-compliance to the contest's format (their contemptuous demeanor during rehearsals, for example), can be seen as a continuation of

dissident practice, as well as the reflection of “a stylised performance of post-Soviet Russian-ness as disobedient, disdainfully proud, and infinitely powerful in that state” (Heller, 2007, p. 204).

This brings us to the wider dilemma of Russian identity politics, which treads a fine line between modernization and self-colonization<sup>9</sup> (Kujundzic, 2000). t.A.T.u.'s purposefully informal attire of white t-shirts and jeans (as well as that of Dima Bilan in 2006), contrasts starkly with the tendency towards “overdressing” characteristic of Russia's domestic pop scene. The girls modelled and mimicked the looks and style of globalised pop music culture. However, their immaculate looks, perfectly shaped bodies and carefully managed stage movements were out of keeping with the “casual” stage image and behavior of Western pop idols. Other (more recent) Russian Eurovision acts further explain how a nation might strive to modernize itself while resisting that very modernization. In the 2007 entry verbal lyrics still took precedence over visual demeanor, albeit in “negative” mode. A previously unknown group called *Serebro* sang a number whose vulgar, money-worshipping lyrics seemed to dismiss all claims to morality out of hand:

Oh! Don't call me funny bunny  
I'll blow your money money  
I'll get you to my bad ass spinning for you  
Oh! I'll make it easy honey  
I'll take your money yummy  
I've got my bitches standing up next to me.

Several acts (t.A.T.u, Serebro and Podolskaya in 2005<sup>10</sup>) strive to convey a messianic/moralistic message in line with the “heroic or apocalyptic self-definition of Russian culture” (Boym, 1994, p. 2). Serebro's excessive and trashy performance is a rebellion against the commodification of society, and the trampling underfoot of traditional Russian non-material values such as co/suffering (*so/stradanie*) and the importance of the soul (*dusha*). Images of the USA are combined with nostalgia for Cold War opposition to

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<sup>9</sup>Self-colonization is treated as Eastern Europe discourse that performs its “civilizational inferiority” with respect to the West. Examples of self-colonization narratives in Russia include the times of Peter the Great or the debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers about Russia's relationship with modernity.

<sup>10</sup>The song in 2005 performed by Natalia Podolskaya contained a political message and a clear anti-American sentiment:

Hello sweet America, where did our dream disappear?  
Look at little Erica, all she learns today is the fear.  
You deny the truth, you're just having fun;  
“til your child will shoot your gun.

the pervasively negative influence of capitalism. These entries both expose pop-music's links with capitalist ideology (e.g. the commodification theme in Serebro's show) and reveal a (post) Soviet reflexivity, using the ESC as a way to escape from everyday routine and find an alternative place for cultural survival (Boym, 1994, p. 26). This is in continuous with Soviet times, where the song was "an essential part in 'a grand totalitarian spectacle'" (ibid, p. 110).

Serebro's performance invokes sexual excess in the form of the deliberately hyperbolized image of the prostitute, turning it into a form of *kitsch* or ironical "poshlost"<sup>11</sup>. Serebro also engage in a subversive mimicry of t.A.T.u.'s stage image, performing their own ESC entry in school uniform and thus exposing their predecessors' collusion with the commercialist enterprise, along with that of Britney Spears, Japanese schoolgirls, "The Spice Girls" and other acts, which play to the infantilized sexual fantasies of (Western) men. Their vulgar lyrics and celebration of the new Russian ideology of glamour (Rudova, 2008) combines with the skilful citation of high cultural musical, visual and literary works. The entries thus illustrate how "[p]ost-Soviet appropriations of international pop styles wittingly or unwittingly mock the moral pieties and hypocrisy of Western democratic societies, while coyly asserting the uniqueness and innate superiority of "Russianness" (Heller, 2007, p.196). We must now consider how the exaggerated homosexual eroticism of Dima Bilan's performances can inform our analysis.

### Eurovision politics and gay camp: Dima Bilan in 2008

In 2006 Bilan's song "Never Let You Go" came second in the ESC. In 2008 his song "Believe" was the winning entry. It succeeded in transforming perceptions of Russia's relationship with European identity. One of the changes in the singer's persona was its deployment of camp aesthetics as a means of appealing to a homosexual audience. The performer is accompanied by two "Bohemian" males (a famous Hungarian violinist with a Stradivarius, and an Olympic Russian figure skater). At the end of the performance, dressed in white, Bilan unbuttons his shirt in an awkwardly coy gesture, exposing a well-honed body to complement to an equally well honed stage persona exuding *faux* "casualness." This openly gay gesturing is in a stark contrast to the invisibility of homosexual discourse during the Soviet period (Baer, 2009, p.1) and in contemporary Russia, where despite certain improvements since the 1990s, "Putin's conservative — national politics has sought to set clear limits to reform" (Healey, 2010, p. 211) denying gays the visibility they enjoy elsewhere.

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<sup>11</sup>The non-official title of Serebro's song at Russian pop market was "Whores".

The act thus bridges rigid official culture with non-mainstream grassroots “alternative” identities. The construction of the act around three prominent, “metrosexual” male figures recalls the associations linking homosexuality with elitist (*elitarnaia*) Russian culture. It “constitutes a link to Russia’s prerevolutionary culture and to the anti-Soviet concept of aesthetic pleasure” (Baer, 2009, p. 16), as well as to (Soviet) Estrada. Bilan recalls singers such as V. Leont’ev, who even during Soviet times indulged in performances redolent with elements of camp culture. Tolerance of such phenomena in the USSR can be attributed to “the circus roots of Estrada, the arts of the clowns and comics” (MacFadyen, 2002, p. 61). Bilan’s Eurovision entry thus enacts a “deviation from the norm” similar to those permissible within the framework of Soviet Estrada.

Russia’s Eurovision performances frequently betray the legacy of Estrada, exploiting the multiple and contradictory ways in which it is able to engage with the commercialized global music market. Both of Bilan’s entries demonstrate an Estrada-style eclecticism and mixing of genres, as the performances strive to combine high with low art: two ballet dancers and a piano in Bilan’s 2006 and a violinist in 2008. The stage behavior is also consciously managed to contribute to the branding of Russia’s image for the West as the artists opt for an expansiveness of gesture and boldness in the use of space whose symbolic import is all too obvious. This marks a significant departure from the performance styles of their Soviet predecessors whose subtle, restrained hand and leg movements conveyed “a private, more lyrical form of expression” (MacFadyen, 2002, p.184). Bilan frequently appropriates vast amounts of stage space by (almost) crossing the invisible line between him and the audience. Also noteworthy is his confidence in manipulating proximity and distance; his act commences with him kneeling barefoot close to the edge of the stage displaying an overzealous attention to the camera and finishes with him abruptly walking to backstage. The confident appropriation of stage space is also evident in the performances of t.A.T.u, who approach the audience in the first row, and of the Serebro trio of girls who demonstratively and exaggeratedly “play with” their microphone poles. In all three cases the artists’ use of stage space is self-conscious, deliberately artificial and therefore self-ironical, allowing them to distance themselves from the alternatively aggressive and eroticized meanings their gestures connote.

Prikladko’s performance in 2009 represents a contrast with her immediate precursors.<sup>12</sup> Sexual excess is here no longer at the heart of the act. The subdued eroticism (the singer’s figure is covered in a long, white, loosely fitting dress and her body remains

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<sup>12</sup>2009 was the year when Russia hosted the contest and it is perhaps this which dictated the desire to deviate from recent convention. The performance concentrates on the vocals of a female singer and, in a gesture of rebellion against the Eurovision canon, did not include any choreography. This disengagement from Euro-taste (also noticeable in Peter Nalich’s 2010 performance) raises the question of how free the artists were and is the political pressures they may have been working under.

quite static) rather recalls early Soviet cinema and the beginnings of Estrada. Her song is based around the theme of motherhood, which appeals to the most traditional values, but also evokes Russia's messianic status as the bearer of eternal (spiritual) values. At the same time, her act engages in a search for the core values of the post-imperial phase of Russian nation-building (the song is performed by a Ukrainian singer and composed by a Georgian song writer), thus transforming itself into a "utopian ideological map of motherland" (Boym, 1994, p.114). Thus, Prikhodko deploys the countercultural rhetoric of Eurovision to articulate the official discourse of Russian identity both for local, FSU and international audience, while acting as a host of the ESC. Her performance is similar to Bilan's ironic appropriation of homoerotic energy and of a stage image in order to promote "Russian-ness." This "exploitation" of West European counter culture for the purpose of post-Soviet nation-branding takes place at the intersection between the intercultural and the intracultural as discussed above.

In Bilan's case, the ambiguity of the gay stance is particularly productive, owing to "the discursive force behind homosexuality [which] comes precisely from ... metonymic dispersal, that is, from the many connotative or associative meanings surrounding it" (Baer, 2009, p. 3). The overstated homosexual eroticism of Bilan's entry migrates between conflicting meanings: negative ("Western" decadence, emasculation, etc.) and positive (artistic sophistication, personal freedom, modernity, etc). The kitsch aesthetic of the ESC provides the ground on which these associative meanings can be adopted, shed, contested, and negotiated, allowing homosexuality to be portrayed, for instance, both in its continuity with the Russian pre-revolutionary tradition, and as a "negative" influence resulting from post-Soviet Russia's over-exposure to Western degeneracy.

### Russian Euro-branding strategies

The strategies of embracing sexual excess in the analyzed entries reference developmental geography (spanning the twin divides between a cynically exploitative, decadent West and a vulnerable, yet pristine East, and between the eternal values of rural/local tradition and the ephemeral temporality of the new, the urban and the fashionable). They ironise the global media's obsession with gay culture using a manufactured "western" homoeroticism in order to flatter (Western) European viewers, and at the same time knowingly to disparage the West's cultural imperialism for the benefit of domestic audiences. Bilan — a Russian heterosexual performer — presents himself as a "global gay," just as t.A.T.u. enact a titillating lesbianism. The fact that the fakery remains largely "uncovered" by the Western public is part of the very point of the performance.

Russia's ESC performances thus constitute a response to the Western imagination of "Russians as a heterosexual nation standing firmly between the promiscuous West and barbarian East; as an 'alternative modernity'" (Baer, 2009, p. 5). The sexual excess

represents a form of counter strategy, in which, instead of a promiscuous and “heterosexual” Russia available for the Western consumer, the entries construct a *stio*b image of the homosexual pop star (Bilan in 2008) or the jester (Nalich<sup>13</sup> in 2010). This can be read as a post-imperial rebellion against the “colonial gaze” with reference to the long history of Western imaginations of an Eastern Europe treated with curiosity and sympathy, continuously examined but never understood (Baer, 2009).

The shows are also important mediators, and moderators, of national homophobic anxieties and fears of/fascination with the overt sexualisation of global culture. A certain amount of pastiche (the Olympic figure skater supplementing the performance in 2008 or the excessively vulgar lyrics in 2007) leaves the Russian viewer wondering if this mixing of genres is no more than a pathetic pandering to Western licentiousness or, on the contrary, a “carnavalesque” mockery drawing on the early medieval tradition of the jester (*shut*), or the *skomorokh*, who in their eccentric performances were allowed to explore and to break various ideological taboos (Partan 2007, pp. 487-488). Significantly, “homosexuality” was tolerated in pre-revolutionary Russia under the label of *clownishness*, and within the traditions of the 19-20<sup>th</sup> century *balagan* (ibid, p. 489).

Purged of its licentiousness, the Western culture of bad taste can be deployed to articulate official versions of nationhood as Prikhodko's case revealed. It is also employed (Serebro, t.A.T.u., Bilan) to cater to local youth subcultures, but because of the posture of distance, also to bridge the intergenerational chasm in post-Soviet Russia (where dramatic shifts in attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and the aesthetics of pop music have left the older generation feeling alienated and repelled). It “speaks” to those communities which have a more positive stance towards same-sex relations due to the rebellious nature of “younger audiences receptive to explorations of sexual desire” (Heller, 2007, p. 206) and/or to a submergence in the universalizing trends, which, as Baer notes (2009, p.7), ensure, that “everyone is *capable* of experiencing same-sex desire.” But at the same time, the element of carnivalesque mockery and hyperbole signals that traditional attitudes of disdain for, and suspicion of, such trends, have not been altogether abandoned.

Euro-trash can further serve as a tool in Russia's ongoing quest for continuity, authenticity and the revitalization of the Soviet (Estrada) heritage. Russia's greater engagement with Western music styles and its immersion in the multi-directional flow of global meanings is entangled with a nostalgia for the conditions of musical production in the late Soviet period (e.g. the underground/rock scene, Beatlemania, etc),<sup>14</sup> when the alternative

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<sup>13</sup>Nalich is an eclectic singer owing his tremendous popularity to the “stio” clip “Guitar” placed on the Internet in 2007. However, his performance goes beyond the scope of current data set.

<sup>14</sup>This “[ ] partially sentimental efforts to reclaim the resistant, “cheerful” spirit of Soviet culture expressed in a musical legacy” (Heller, 2007, p. 201) might explain the inability of Russian musicians to translate creative potential into global hits.

musical subculture defined itself against the regime in a performance of resistance. Euro-kitsch (which emanates from the “Other”) is, paradoxically, the very force capable of maintaining the integrity and continuity of the Russian cultural Self by expressing a longing for the legacy of the USSR which, however, amounts to less than a desire to recreate it.

Like that of its post-Soviet neighbors, Russia's process of communication with its imaginary “Others” inevitably entails a *defensive* resistance to “foreign” cultural elements and a nostalgia for “familiar” local phenomena such as the Soviet orientation towards high culture, literariness and canonical texts. Russia's distance from, rather than its proximity to, Europe is foregrounded. Claims to be the holders of certain distinctive national values (e.g. the spirituality of the Russian intelligentsia) go hand in hand with the ideology of glamour, exclusivity, and elitism, and the deliberate manipulation of the culture of homosexuality or, as Rygina (2004) tellingly refers to it, “abnormal” sexuality, as a marketing strategy. This defensiveness overlaps with Gudkov's concept of “negative identity” (2004) — the defining of the self exclusively in contradistinction to multiple negative others — characteristic of contemporary Russian nationhood. In this context, it may be difficult to assess the extent to which this “defensiveness” shapes Russian branding strategy at Eurovision. What is clear, however, is the careful line Russia's Eurovision entries tread between, on one hand, going beyond the conventions of high cultural taste characteristic of Russia's image in the West, and on the other hand, distancing themselves from the *bad taste* with which the ESC is commonly identified. In both senses, Russian Eurovision “speaks” to Western Europe by at once “embracing” and “repelling” it.

## CONCLUSION

The paper looked at Russia's submergence within the counter culture of Euro-trash. It emerged that the country's deployment of the culture of sexual excess in its Eurovision performances enabled it to delineate a national brand in relation to a paradigm of European/Western “Others” through a sequence of reverse mirrorings. For instance, Bilan's act illuminates Russian perceptions of “the global gay” community (it represents an image of the “Western Other” as seen by “Us”). Meanwhile, Serebro's deliberately overstated, kitschified “prostitute” constitutes “Our” projection of how Russia is perceived by “Them” (the Western “Other”).

At the same time, the ironized performances point to Russia's own ambivalence about the need for self-modernising transformation. As Serebro demonstrated, post-Soviet nations can “*appear*” modern; but this does not necessarily mean that they *strive* for modernization (at least as defined by the West). Russian mastery of the language of kitsch casts doubt on Western assumptions about post-Soviet cultural backwardness, undermines the presumed



“authenticity” of the West and challenges perceptions of Russia’s need to affiliate itself with it.

Despite contradictions in the “packaging” of Russia for Eurovision, the nation’s entries demonstrate its evolving capacity for sophisticated and compelling symbolic production. This culminated in 2008, when Bilan won the contest — an event that cannot be attributed solely to political maneuvering. The resources poured into Russia’s Eurovision effort is part of a wider campaign to “improve its image” in the West. Its launch of accomplished international English and Arabic news channels, and the impressive National Exhibition it held in Paris (Rozhnov, 2010) are among several achievements in that campaign. It is unlikely that the ESC will cease to play a leading role in Russia’s (re)branding mission owing to the degree, to which the competition’s annual rituals and rich symbolism of excess have infiltrated everyday, popular culture throughout Europe.

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# LIFESTYLE PROGRAMS ON RUSSIAN TELEVISION

VERA ZVEREVA

*This article explores representations of Russian middle class in the lifestyle television shows. It focuses on Russian lifestyle television programmes (2000-2010) and the ways in which these programmes portray the everyday life of the middle class. Although the format of lifestyle programmes is generic, the Russian series have their own peculiar features. They range from the rhetoric and stories told by protagonists to the fact that the shows offer images of everyday life that are often absent or misinterpreted in series, documentaries and news. This is coupled with the variation of approaches to representations of cultural norms and gender roles in the shows. The article scrutinises these representations of middle class lifestyle on Russian television screen and questions whether they reflect the dynamism and fluidity of their prime target audience — the middle class in Russia.*

**Keywords:** television, Russia, lifestyles, middle class, identity, representation

Since the fall of the Soviet Union Russian society has undergone significant socio-economic restructuring and experienced increasing social polarization. Contemporary society in Russia consists of a small group of extremely wealthy people, usually connected to the system of state administration or state monopolies, and the impoverished people from poorest strata of the society (Shkaratanet et al., 2009). Both extremes escape sociological scrutiny. However, they find their representation in media where they are often presented in grotesque forms, which I discuss later.

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It is even more difficult to demarcate the boundaries and identification strategies of Russian middle class. This stems from the fact that it has a very complicated structure encompassing various social groups with different levels of income, access to power, attitudes towards political and social changes in post-Soviet Russia, and strategies to the market economy (Belyaeva, 200; Diligenskii, 2002). The rapid change in social dynamics means that the scope of the middle class is constantly in flux. Moreover, self-identification of respondents with the middle class frequently does not correspond to their actual standard of living.<sup>1</sup>

The question of interest for scholars studying social dynamics in Russia is to what extent traditional and modern values are shared by members of middle class groups (Diligenskii, 2002). It seems that the social and psychological model of an “ordinary Soviet person” (Levada, 1993; Gudkov, 2004) is still widespread among the middle class. This model is characterized by jealousy and suspicion towards personal success, an endeavour to preserve one’s social and professional situation, expectation of the state’s support and disbelief in one’s ability to change unfavourable conditions of living. However, the same studies show that another model that is of a person with an active lifestyle, who will adopt innovations, and give priority to personal freedom is emerging.

The dynamism of current social processes in Russia, the diversity of identifications and lifestyles of the middle class people — in conjunction with the lack of imaginative and original programmes on central TV — create disparity in presentation of everyday life on television. The lifestyle programmes, which seek to represent contemporary society, are often late to respond to the ongoing social and cultural transformation and thus reproduce stereotypical representations. The aim of this study is to examine televised images of

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<sup>1</sup>According to cluster analysis of social stratification in Russia the middle class can be divided into groups according to three criteria — availability of power functions, level of income and completed education. The first cluster (6% of respondents) are in the “high status” stratum consisting of people with “strong social positions,” who have a high annual income, an access to power resources, and higher education (Beliaeva, 2005). This category includes successful businessmen, top-managers, and administrators. The second cluster (20%) or “experts” includes “well-to-do” people with higher education, but lack of power resources. They include specialists, primarily employed in the budget sphere or representatives of humanitarian intelligentsia. The third group (38%) “realists” consists of qualified workers, traders and entrepreneurs — people involved, for example, in service, commerce, and building industries. This cluster is more or less adapted to the market economy. Closeness of the second and third group, argues Beliaeva, demonstrates the decreasing significance of higher education in today’s Russia (2005). The fourth and fifth clusters can be described as the “new poor” (11%) and “old poor” (25%). The principal distinction between these groups is that the representatives of the fourth group — unlike those of the fifth — have some higher education. They are teachers, doctors, and scholars, who were unable to adapt themselves to the market economy and were driven to poverty in the 1990s. Despite that, many members of this group still identify themselves with the middle class or the lower middle class.

everyday life communicated to the middle class Russian viewers and to reveal some ideological assumptions embedded in TV representations of ordinary lifestyles, social norms and role models. The set of programmes about consumption, makeovers, and remodelling broadcast on central Russian channels (2001-2010) include such shows as *Take It Off Immediately!*, *Fashion Inoculation*, *Fashion Verdict*, *Relish*, *Housing Problem*, and *The School of Decor* (“Snimite eto nemedlenno!,” “Modnaya Privivka,” “Modnyi Prigovor,” “Smak,” “Kvartirnyi vopros,” and “Shkola remonta”). Their focus is on the narrative, keywords and visual images that convey set of values and ideological assumptions to the audience.

First, I will outline my theoretical stance by placing the lifestyle programmes within the framework of contemporary modernity. Then, I will discuss their place among other entertainment projects on Russian TV and argue that these lifestyle programmes present images of ‘normal’ everyday life which are often absent from television series, documentaries and the news. This will be followed by an analysis of various problems that arise from the representation of the middle class in lifestyle shows. Specific messages of several programmes in question will be examined more thoroughly, especially the portrayal of women in makeover shows. This will be followed by some concluding remarks.

## CONSUMPTION, LIFESTYLE AND EVERYDAY LIFE ON TV

Since 2000s TV industry was challenged by the rise of globally-available digital media. It had to adjust itself to viewers’ feedback and demands for entertainment and accessibility as a means to stay in competition with hybrid internet and specialized television channels. Among other things the shift meant that it became easier for an “ordinary person” to appear on the TV-screen (Turner, 2010). An introduction of popular reality and day shows made television more democratic as viewers were able to voice their preferences, and more accessible, leading to an increase in its viewership, e.g. teenage audience.

It was around the same time when the production of lifestyle programmes on Russian television peaked. The interest towards style of living is not incidental. In 2000s one can easily find in Russian media culture features, described by Western scholars in the 1970s-80s. The media shifted to the constant production of theoretical knowledge, or more precisely, of theoretically stylized information. According to Daniel Bell, postmodern society produces “theoretical knowledge” ceaselessly; concerned with all spheres of life, from production, intellectual culture and high-tech to everyday life and popular recommendations “what to do if” (Bell, 1973). Lifestyle programmes translated ‘theoretical knowledge’ into a simple or even trivial language.

Another contributing factor is the rapid growth of the middle class in Russia. Throughout the 2000s the media followed the scheme described by Pierre Bourdieu, that is,

correlation of “good taste” and “right consumption.” Bourdieu speaks about the culture of the new petit bourgeoisie whose taste is legitimised by television (Bourdieu, 1984). This culture feeds on the constant worries of the new petit bourgeoisie, i.e. their fear of not being able to meet the “right” standards. It also forces the media to formulate and reproduce directions and educational “texts” which aim at alleviating fears related to the correct, good taste and manners, and helping viewers shape their lifestyle, appearance, home décor, etc. These texts are supposed to improve one’s self-esteem and ability for self-expression.

For example, programmes about ideal interiors and appearances establish some basic principles of bourgeois culture. Here style and taste are of importance; shopping is treated as a leisure practice and consumption is seen as able to solve various psychological and social problems. The purchase of consumer goods is associated with the acquisition of non-material values that have high symbolic status in culture. Consumption is presented as a contemporary culture’s universal mechanism for constructing one’s life space and mastering one’s life by introducing an individual meaning to it. Thus, television programmes about lifestyle perform several functions: they regulate post-industrial consumerist culture oriented toward constant sales, and they stimulate the market’s dynamic quest for new fashion, emotions and experiences. Such programmes help to build a media space where the desire of a person to improve him/herself/their partners, image, household and consumption patterns can be satisfied.

In this sense programmes about the choice of garments, makeup and hairstyle, home decor, gardening, cooking, and shopping, as well as TV-shops-on-sofa help to aestheticize everyday life. This is accomplished through visual signals alluding to joy, prosperity, social confidence, self-expression and self-realization through one’s lifestyle choices. Daily life is represented as capable of turning into a fairytale, and consumerist logic is portrayed as able to transform functional things into supra-functional and magic ones. A lifestyle that reflects the demands of a social group, e.g. how personality should be) is interpreted as a “correct” one. The competence to build up a “required” lifestyle/image via consumption and accumulation of material things is presented as a key to securing social approval and inner harmony<sup>2</sup>.

Lifestyle programmes play a crucial role in socialization. They illustrate how to adapt oneself to culture and be perceived “up to date” by wearing certain set of clothes or preparing meals like celebrities do. This becomes increasingly important in the context of interrelated social and cultural spheres as well as increasing globalisation. Through such programmes one learns about the everyday experiences of others, which is especially

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<sup>2</sup>While the culture of modernity supports the idea about the importance of the choice of material goods for shaping of one’s image, the post-modern culture rejects this pressure to be/seem different depending on class, profession, gender, or age.

important when a person is assimilating into a new community. Finally, such programmes are of importance since they help people to shape their own individual image and contribute to the process of self-understanding. In a sense what is at stake here is everyday literacy and the ability to communicate using the visual components of everyday life.

## LIFESTYLE PROGRAMS ON RUSSIAN TV

Despite the rising importance of the Internet, television remains a very popular mode of communication in Russia. Recent studies of Russian television reveal a lot about the specific circumstances in which it operates, and about possible consequences for the range and content of the programmes (Kachkaeva et al., 2010). It is established that the content of television programmes is regulated by the state and the ideological pressure on the TV is constantly increasing. The closure of successful independent channels and TV-journalist projects in the 1990s, which occurred within the framework of underdeveloped cable networks and the absence of other alternative options, led to the disappearance of political discussion shows and the like. Despite several attempts to produce innovative projects, most TV channels opted for simplified ways of achieving commercial success. In particular, Russian television channels witnessed the rise of entertainment-driven projects. Among these successful projects are the programmes about the everyday life such as the “science” of shopping, decoration and stylization.

The link between everyday life and consumption became vitally important when Russia became exposed to market ideology. The media culture of 1990s displayed an obvious turn towards lifestyle as one of the societal priorities. The media were permeated by a number of fashion and leisure magazines targeting various consumer groups. The initial exposure to the foreign consumerist and individualistic lifestyles on Russian TV was through advertisements. As these advertisements transmitted visual images of everyday foreign luxurious life they were seen against the background of poverty and social instability and, as a result, were often rejected. However, gradually the viewers got used to the world of advertisements and began to draw parallels between health, love, youth, success and the acquisition of wealth and goods.

The new middle class was concerned with the quality of life rather than with survival. This was exposed in the early 2000s by such series from the A-media company as *My Fair Nanny* (“Moya Prekrasnaya Nyanya”) and *Better Be Born Lucky Than Fair* (“Ne Rodis’ Krasivoi”). These shows, in line with consumer-oriented television programming, contributed to the construction of new norms of everyday life. Moreover, Russian TV introduced a new format of a “Lifestyle programme” presented by such popular programmes as *Take it off immediately!*, *Fashion Inoculation*, *Fashion Verdict*, *Relish*, *Housing Problem*, *The School of Decor*, and *The Vegetable Life* (“Snimite eto nemedlenno!,” “Modnaya

Privivka,” “Modnyi Prigovor,” “Smak,” “Kvartirnyi vopros,” “Shkola remonta,” and “Rastitelnaya zhizn”).

Although these programmes have dissimilar formats, their “message” is similar. They tell the story of transformation of the main characters’ image/houses/garden, etc. with the help of stylists and designers. Ideology behind *Fashion Verdict* on Channel 1 is close to that of *Take It Off Immediately!* on the STS channel. Although most of the Russian lifestyle, consumerism and glamour television projects are clones of the existing international shows, they have several distinct features in their plot and structure. Their portrayal of common life stories, the social types and issues is structured so as to bring these programmes closer to Russian viewers. While producing images of what is perceived as ordinary and normal everyday life, the show tries to ground it in a reality the viewers can easily relate to.

Representation of the middle class on Russian television encounters several primary problems. Much of the current programming concentrates on images of an “everyday life” that has little in common with the lives of ordinary viewers. Firstly, there are numerous representations of the authorities, media celebrities, and “underworld” characters. News programmes are filled with the images of presidents, ministers, policemen, clergy and industrialists. Secondly, the majority of documentaries and entertainment programmes focus on violence, crime and imaginary enemies.

All this strengthens the habitual self-perception of a “post-Soviet ordinary person”: viewers’ attention is diverted to the authorities, of which paternal care is expected, and to the images of inaccessible wealth. Although the everyday life of an ordinary citizen has difficulties, it is also depicted as having a degree of stability. While viewers are portrayed as an object of the government’s care, they are made aware that this stability and fortune of the “privileged” can be lost at any time. On the opposite side of this continuum there are police series. Here society is depicted as dangerous, criminal and threatening to the private space of the viewer.

Russian police series became extremely popular in 2000s. In these programmes the focus is on various crimes committed by members of the lower classes. NTV, which after its radical forcible transformation in 2001 became one of the leading channels, boasts several prime-time crime documentary programmes — *The Extraordinary Incident*, *Programme Maximum*, and *A Confrontation* (“Chrezvychainoe Proishestvie,” “Programma Maximum,” “Ochnaya Stavka”). Their common background is poverty and deplorable living conditions. Phrases emanating from these programmes such as “doctors were horrified: here salmonella is offered on plate,” “the crime group’s turnover is 10 kg of heroin a day,” “everything in the house is covered with blood,” etc. (*The Extraordinary Incident*, 31.03.2009) create an impression of social decline. The image of poverty, disaster and mutual distrust are presented as widespread conditions. This strategy triggers viewers’ anxiety about their relatives’ safety and attained standard of living. Instead of striving for more, one is determined not to lose



what is already there. This is supplemented with a lack of trust in law enforcement and central authorities.

In this context the televised glamour shows provide an escape from this reality. It is not a coincidence that a significant share of television shows depicts fairytale lives of celebrities and pop stars. Here, popular and successful musicians appear in celebrity gossip programmes, e.g. *You Would Not Believe It!* (“Ty ne poverish!”). The news about celebrities’ private lives—over-consumption, huge salaries and insane expenses— are presented as important for everyone.

## SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND THE MODELS OF LIFESTYLE

As the formats discussed above showed, the diverse scenarios and lifestyles of the middle class in Russia remain underrepresented on Russian television screen. However, the images of what is perceived as normal, everyday life are of great importance for the middle class audience. Different lifestyle programmes have recently incorporated new, interesting and accessible images which the middle class viewer can relate to. The depiction of “real” people (doctors, teachers, managers, programmers, advertising agents, entrepreneurs, students, and pensioners) with their dilemmas is foregrounded. In lifestyle shows the main characters do not fight external threats or aspire for mere survival, instead they seek to improve their everyday life by introducing innovations. Such programmes appeal to basic modern values such as status, taste, self-actualisation, optimization and rationalization, e.g. “They found perfect and very rational solution for their small flat” (*Housing Problem*, 12.05.2001).

Such TV endeavours to present competing versions of reality that reflect various income levels and life strategies of groups within the middle class. The models of desirable everyday life are taken from a number of sources. In programmes such as *The Housing Problem* and *The School of Decor* the usual strategy is to promote a slightly higher social image than that of the participant. Architects, stylists, and designers offer redecoration advice, which involves stylistic choices preferred by people in higher classes. These options are presented as more attractive and/or containing an infinite source of innovation. The regular trajectory of an episode may include a housewife looking for a job, or a school teacher or a novice manager who needs to change his or her image. Through the process of change, e.g. the redecoration of a two-bedroom flat where a family with two children lives, the show exposes differences between the old and the new while emphasizing the television programme’s creative power.

The participants are typically people facing recognisable and common issues: three generations live together in one small flat with no space for children’s toys or books; a woman has several pairs of jeans and no evening dress; a young programmer prefers jumpers

to suits; a mother wears dressing gowns at home instead of some more modern home attire, etc. The programme is expected to do more than just present a creative solution to a problem of limited space or unattractive image. These shows offer something that was previously financially unattainable but exactly what the viewers have been aspiring to have, e.g. a house decorated with modern materials or several sets of relatively inexpensive clothes by well-known brands. In this manner, these programmes assist their participants in climbing one more step up the social ladder towards a more prestigious lifestyle. This new image is often linked to a generalized Western associated with modernity.

Despite the tendency to “glamour” lifestyle promoted by such shows the financial constraints of the viewers are rarely mentioned. For example, in the programmes about image and style (*Take It Off Immediately!*) bad taste is presented as women’s worst enemy: “the item looks “cheap”; “classic things should have a lining,” “it is 100% terrible synthetics”; “look how this zip was put in!”; “things clash with each other,” “it is not a style.” One of the most crucial reasons for women’s “dull” image — their low income— is rarely mentioned. The programme invites only those people who the viewers are able to relate to, e.g. those for whom the programme’s budget of 50,000 roubles looks like a significant sum of money. One of the recent cases illustrates this:

Anna, 26, has come from the town Pushkin. She is a single mother of a three-year-old daughter. She had been an accountant but could not find a job and is working as a shop assistant. Permanent financial problems do not permit her to buy new clothes. She has to wear second-hand clothes from her relatives. It is not surprising that men do not pay any attention to her, and she cannot find a decent relationship (*Take It Off Immediately!* 20.05.2007).

These lifestyle programmes gloss over the everyday problems of the upper middle class. One of the reasons is the negative portrayal of “extreme” prosperity in the early 2000s. Initially this discourse sought to be helpful for fighting big tycoons and reinstating populist ideas that linked wealth with crime and anti-national policies. Instead, it functioned as a counterbalance to the idea of modernization that advocates social mobility, initiative, and success. Television presented a negative image of the oligarch who lived in an elite district along the Roublevka motorway. This image moved from news to entertainment programmes, for example, the series *Roublevka-Live*. It reflected the idea that wealth does not make one happy and that the rich are often immoral and detached from “ordinary” people. As a result, the higher middle class has not been widely depicted on the television screen.

While condemning certain kinds of wealth, Russian television accepts and often encourages wealth of another kind - the success of celebrities. As was mentioned, viewers are presented with the myth of a dream life enjoyed by the rich and famous. The language of glamour becomes a mediator of style and image connecting the higher and lower strata.

For upper middle class people — businessmen, highly-paid professionals or media presenters — the only chance of being represented on television is during shows, music and business awards or gala-concerts. While this exposure is not adequate, it is better than the total absence from most of the popular media, or the repulsive portrayals such as those from the *Roublevka-Live* series. Other than that their everyday life is generally hidden from the audience. Television does not show what the apartments of successful business people look like or what an average working day of an editor of a popular magazine is. In other words, the life of a substantial part of the Russian elite remains unknown to television viewers.

If the top of a celebrity's consumption pyramid is accessible to very few, its foundation could be approached by anybody. Celebrity models are copied on a mass scale with a simple built-in formula: viewers are offered to sample and purchase similar items to those owned by famous people but made by considerably cheaper brands. Media star socialites narrate their shopping habits and demonstrate other varieties of symbolic consumption. For instance, the programme *A Blonde in Chocolate* ("Blondinka v Schokolade," MUS-TV) offers the viewers a chance to eavesdrop on the life of provocative television presenter Ksenia Sobchak. In one episode Sobchak exaggerates her own "perversity" of "being spoilt by wealth": she is shown to despise ordinary, poor people with bad taste. In another episode, she is going through a pile of handbags in a very expensive shop: "It is called Chanel for the poor. It's like a dream of dupes, like Chanel for the poor, certainly. I can see already those fashionable chicks from Butovo<sup>3</sup> with such bags" (*A Blonde in Chocolate*, 23.10.2006). Occasionally the programme reverts to a more serious tone such as when Sobchak is picking out new clothes and accessories. She comments on, explains and promotes them. Viewers can relate to the image of pop-aristocracy, and can attempt to reproduce it through stylization on a lower consumerist level.

In programmes that deal with selecting a new image for the participants one can often find references to a life of luxury. In *Fashion Inoculation* and *Take It Off Immediately!* contestants initially fit into well-known roles, e.g. a mother of a grown-up daughter, a business lady, a shy girl suffering from the way she looks, or a young, single-mother with low-income or a tired housewife. These women are offered make-overs and opportunities for a lifestyle change. The presenters often state that a transformed participant looks like an actress or a model, or that what is happening reminds them of a film. Women's images, actions and normal daily appearance are dramatized. For instance, the participant of the make-over episode is told: "Many romantic films begin with a medical congress where a beautiful female doctor meets a surgeon or a doctor, and they start an affair. Do you like such perspective? Well, I see a striking female doctor in front of me. Have you watched a

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<sup>3</sup>Butovo is one of the districts in Moscow.

series where Clooney appears? Today you are a girl from this series" (*Fashion Inoculation*, 18.02.2007).

The process of transformation from an ugly-duckling often requires abrupt changes, e.g. from jeans and trainers to an evening dress with rhinestones and stiletto heels. The onscreen transformation often appears as metamorphoses of Cinderella turning into a princess. However, in day-to-day life, glamorous women do not work. The long-term changes are required to create a new sustainable lifestyle, image and social model. It proves to be a much more difficult and complicated task than television can provide solutions for.

## TV STRATEGIES: INVESTIGATION VS. MEETING VIEWERS' EXPECTATIONS

There is another serious problem with the representation of everyday life on television. The growing Russian middle class is heterogeneous and consists of many different social and cultural groups. The most obvious way is to explore the milieu and try to represent this variety of social types — people with different occupations, values, ways of living and habits on TV screen. It seems that such programmes could make good the absence of representation of multiple "others" in contemporary Russian society. However, the central TV channels do not follow this strategy as it is more difficult and expensive to accomplish. Instead, they provide a recombination of well-known or even stereotypical social roles and types. To a certain extent, such a representation of everyday life fits the expectations of the viewers.

There are several ways to foster the self-identification of viewers with characters in lifestyle programmes. One of them is to relate the audience to Soviet everyday life, which is seen by many viewers as a more or less reliable identifier. As a result, the middle class is present in line with recognizable and acceptable behaviour, e.g. in a series about Soviet times *Moscow Saga* ("Moskovskaya Saga") or *The Gromovs* ("Gromovy").

Some lifestyle shows address the cultural memory of viewers when talking about "our traditions" and linking them to the present. It is this unique characteristic that extends the life-span of such programmes as *Housing Problem* and *The School of Decor*. Their plot focuses on radical redecorations of flats and country houses (*dachas*) by a group of invited designers and builders. The implicit assumption is for hosts to narrate their family traditions usually related to a large one, with relatives, children and parents, grandmothers and grandfathers, and numerous friends, tell the story of their life, discuss their hobbies and show photos, thus inviting viewers into their cosy family world. Radical transformations of living rooms and kitchens do not eliminate the family's past but instead seek to link an everyday life and tradition, "memories" and "nice memorable things" from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods incorporating them within the contemporary trends.

Similar to these television shows are programmes that reproduce the rhetoric and images of some Soviet television-texts. Here people from lower classes and “ordinary” consumers are likened to people in Soviet times unfamiliar with the trade tricks. For example, in *Control Purchase* (“Kontrolnaya Zakupka”) presenters and viewers evaluate the quality of cheap popular products such as sausages, cheese, sour cream, preserves, and juice of various brands. Then the invited experts reveal the actual contents of products “unveiling” the truth, e.g. “Experts state that Russia exports 3<sup>rd</sup> rate product as meat”; “O. Rosanova, expert: “The Myasnitsky Ryad sausages contain vegetable proteins, semolina and a water-preserving element called carraginan. The Micoyan sausages contain starch not mentioned in the label” (*Control Purchase*, 14.12.2009). The programme appeals to the post-Soviet viewers, who perceive themselves as unsophisticated and inexperienced in practical issues (Levada, 1993). In this case the target groups are irresponsible brand owners and manufactures, and ignorant consumers. The implicit message is: we would not permit them to lie to you any longer and to earn money at your expense.

Another strategy for addressing the audience can be called projective. It aims at portraying new emerging social and cultural models as natural and widespread, and thus convincing viewers of their attractiveness. This strategy is also popular in soaps and sitcoms adapted for the Russian public from American and Latin American original versions such as like *My Fair Nanny*, *Better Be Born Lucky Than Fair*, and *Daddy’s Daughters* (“Moya Prekrasnaya Nyanya,” “Ne Rodis’ Krasivoi,” and “Papiny Dochki”), which attempt to create an appealing image of contemporary life. Although they received a warm welcome from the audience they have to conform to the conventions of the genre when describing ones’ living space.

The programmes on makeover invite viewers to explore the identity of a “European” citizen or a citizen of the global world, who follows fashionable trends. Refurbishment and redecoration of flats in “European” style, in line with so-called “European” and “American” fashion (or, to be precise, in line with products sold by major international brands), strive to reflect the dynamic of modernity. The programme’s producers focus on the “natural” correlation between everyday life in Khrushchev-built blocks of Moscow and apartments in Paris or London. They construct an image of an interconnected world community and tackle the stereotype of “Russians destined for boring everyday routine.”

Further, instead of normative recommendations and artificial “average” lifestyle such programmes now offer a huge variety of popular tastes (Ellis, 2002). This is linked to the demands for customization and diversification voiced by people with various lifestyles. Russian programming has just started mastering this huge variety. For example, some redecoration programmes are based on playful stylizations of interiors in accordance with different ethnic and cultural themes. In the *Housing Problem* the imitation of exotic styles is very common, e.g.: “Business people often lack time to decorate their apartments so Natalia Lebedeva contacted the *Housing Problem*. Vladimir Karelov and Nadezhda

Smirnova of the “Dzendo” studio decorated her room in traditional Japanese style. A mat on the floor, a small tea table, rectangular lamps and certainly bamboo stems!” (*Housing problem*, 09.06.2001).

At the same time, general normative recommendations have not yet lost their power. They are still obvious in such projects as the “TV Shop”, which reproduces an international format where various goods are advertised and sold to viewers who call the studio. Consumerism is a relatively new strategy on Russian television. Such programmes are interesting from the point of view of the choice of goods offered. Through this programming, viewers are immersed into a world of “an essential” steam furniture cleaner, LED alarm clocks, home training equipment for improving one’s body, belts for losing weight, watches with built-in currency detectors, devices counting calories and steam brooms. The illusion offered to the viewers is the feeling that they can move from their ordinary life to a new more exciting world on a whim.

## FEMALE IMAGES: A CASE STUDY

A distinctive feature of Russian lifestyle programmes is that the conventional norms of what constitutes acceptable male and female images and behaviour change slowly. This can be seen through representations of women on the screen. Following the stereotypical notion that taking care of one’s beauty is a female trait, men rarely appear in fashion programmes. For example, in 2009-2010 of all 50 shows of *Fashion Verdict* only three programmes featured men.

The “ideal self” constructed by such shows is an active self-made person. A woman is prescribed a program of self-perfection: to work on herself and “construct” herself constantly. In order to do so, she should be dynamic and open, should be able to tackle various issues and never give up. Finally, she should love herself, and take care of herself: “In every situation the worst option is not to feel disappointed in somebody but to be disappointed in one’s self” (*Take It Off Immediately!* 20.05.2007). Weakness should be avoided as something to be ashamed of since one is supposed to be strong.

A typical heroine is described as a “contemporary young business woman”; her priorities are dictated by the demands of home and work. Professional success is understood as an important component of this lifestyle, and an attractive feminine image, according to the show, is supposed to help her in that, e.g. “If this is one’s attitude to clothes, it would be impossible to achieve anything at work ... We must make sure she gets a salary rise” (*Take It off Immediately*, 20.05.2007). This image of a dynamic person pursuing his/her goals is presented as something to aspire for. The programmes tell women not to be ashamed of their age, and not to be a “donkey” at home. Women are ordered to dedicate one day a week to

themselves, despite pressures coming from their husbands, children, parents and mothers-in-law.

Although a female participant is encouraged to think about herself, her image is constructed within a uniform scenario. Surprisingly, this assumption is rarely questioned, and its meaning is portrayed as uniform and set in stone. "First of all, even at work, we ought to be beautiful women" (*Fashion Inoculation*, 25.02.2007). There is no question of the wide diversity of styles mentioned above, it is just a relatively flexible norm.

The same could be said about the notions of beauty. Studies of gender images repeatedly discuss the ambiguity of this construction, and how difficult it is to draw the demarcation line between freedom and coercion due to the strong pressure of a beauty myth defined by men's standards of female attractiveness (Wolf, N. 1991). Securing a "male glance" is presented as the ultimate goal. The programmes promote the idea that women need to look good in order to boost their self-esteem. Men, in turn, are represented as providing an incentive for women's transformation since it is a woman who is supposed to feel the need to be fancied by men, to start a relationship or to bring back the spark into the marriage, e.g.: "The best way to seduce your own husband is to become a coquette and a beauty" (*Fashion Verdict*, 28.01.2010). Gender roles are obviously quite traditional, e.g. "Men, learn to flatter women. Tell her that she is beautiful in all her clothes, that she has a wonderful face, beautiful hair, slim body, straight back" (*Fashion Verdict*, 28.01.2010).

No matter how many times female participants insist that beauty and fashion are not for them at the beginning of the programme, by the end, they show that deep down they "knew" what a "correct" look is. Stylists advise women to attain a "classic," yet provocative, feminine image through a dress or a skirt, high heels, emphasised waist and hips, and low necklines.

Yet, the ideologies articulated in beauty programmes remain contradictory. On the one hand, participants are prescribed to work on themselves, and their final success is portrayed as a result of their hard work and effort. On the other hand, the beauty image is shown as fulfilled through consumption. The programmes are supported by a set of companies, advertisers, shops, and image studios. The audience is reminded that miracles do happen within commercial consumerist culture but only within the remit of its rules and conditions. Being included in the programme is not only pleasant and interesting but is the price to be paid if a woman wants to change her life and image. Thus, according to these programmes, purchasing clothes and makeup, going to stylists and designers is the only way to reach the desirable state of femininity.

## CONCLUSION

Within the last ten years Russian television channels have supplied their audiences with a range of lifestyle programmes ranging from educational to commercial lifestyle-entertainment shows. These shows occupy an important place in today's Russian television as they bring into focus newly formed Russian middle class with its hopes for social and cultural modernization. The shows elaborate on the issues not sufficiently addressed by other popular series such as the pleasures of everyday life and self-expression through a set of products and styles.

By transmitting the knowledge of everyday life such shows teach their audiences and prescribe certain symbolic order of the society. These programmes insist that the "right consumption" is the important secret of a "successful life." At the same time, consumption is presented as an integral part of contemporary culture where meanings are negotiated. The negotiation is related to the possibility of expressing particular meanings within the framework of consumerist culture. The goal is to segment and diversify the standards within the norm.

Although Russian lifestyle programmes search for a genuine way of representing the new middle class, they encounter several problems. One of them is linked to the fact that modernity can be difficult to present on screen. Realities of life — new languages, professions, trends, ideas, and fashion appear on TV, but with delay. Moreover, the middle class lifestyle is a construct that reduces the real ethnic variety and diversity of subcultures to a certain set of defined types that are represented in the media. In this case, some segments of the social group, e.g. the higher middle class are unrepresented in and substituted by "the pop star" lifestyle.

Most of the programmes combine the elements of Russian habitual everyday life with allusions to Soviet culture and the conventions of European or Western standards of living. By offering various lifestyle models, establishing values of individual freedom and choice such programmes aim to overcome the psychological complex of a "Soviet ordinary person." However, they send conflicting messages as they are frequently constructed around traditional ideas and modes of behaviour, e.g. the distribution of gender roles in fashion programmes. As a result the created lifestyle image is simplistic, conservative and far from being complete.

Finally, the roles and life scenarios offered in television programmes attempt to pin down identity by correlating it to a set of trends, styles and practices and offer it to potential consumers. The idea of writing down and freezing a collection of images and roles contradicts the concept of "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2000), where identities are thought to be fluid, changing, and difficult to demarcate and define. The society and culture are resistant to the strict formulas images and roles depicted in contemporary Russian television. Thus, television programmes in Russia should start searching for dynamic and fluid images of the real middle class.



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# MYTHS ABOUT SOVIET VALUES AND CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN TELEVISION

ANNA NOVIKOVA

*The article demonstrates how over the past two decades Russian television has changed its interpretation of the Soviet Past and used myths of the Soviet period in order to shape a new collective identity. The author analyses popular Russian television programs (i.e. those that are broadcast by Russian state channels and have high rating). She argues that the consequences of a cultural trauma (the collapse of the USSR) have not been overcome and that Russian television offers its viewers models of everyday life that do not promote modernization or successful nation building.*

**Keywords:** television, Russia, collective identity, cultural trauma, Post-Soviet culture

Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has experienced a dramatic transformation in the value system of its population. The stereotypes that shape the everyday life of Russians have changed considerably. There is no uniform interpretation of the Soviet past, although Soviet values have been reappraised several times within the last twenty years. During the first stage — perestroika and the 1990s — emphasis was placed on democratization and establishing closer relations with the West. However, new freedoms did not improve the well-being of the vast majority of Russian people, and the initial euphoria was followed by disillusionment. Life in the USSR has come to be viewed in more idealistic terms as a kind of lost paradise (Dubin, 2007). Television producers sensed this new longing for the Soviet period and responded by creating a number of programs across a variety of genres that incorporated carefully selected Soviet myths in order to attract audiences. In the mid-1990s Soviet life was initially referred to with irony on Russian television but later, in the early

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2000s, signs of nostalgia began to emerge. In recent years various programs on state channels (Channel One, Rossiia, and NTV) have approached Soviet myths with a combination of enthusiasm for exposing crimes of the Soviet period and sentimental tenderness towards the past. This seemingly odd synthesis is likely created by the cultural trauma that Russian society experienced in the twenty years following the collapse of the USSR. The abundance of programs that incorporate Soviet myths (either denouncing or extolling them) aggravates the situation, impeding modernization and hindering the formation of a new collective identity.

The aim of this article is to analyse popular television programs (i.e. those that had high ratings) and to demonstrate how the attitudes of Russian society towards Soviet myths and values have changed. Furthermore, I aim to identify which genres of television programs tend to use Soviet myths most often and to try to establish what impact they might have had on the value systems of their audiences and what role they play in the process of nation building and modernisation.

The research method used here requires careful analysis of television programs both in terms of the content and the format used to present this content. The format has a crucial impact on a program's popularity and rating, and its contents define its significance for society since television programs help to instil certain models of everyday life into their audience's consciousness.

I will attempt to answer the following questions: 1) In the 20 years since the collapse of the USSR what has happened to the collective identity and value systems of people who were brought up in the USSR and exposed to Soviet values?; 2) How did these changes influence their television preferences?; 3) Why do the Soviet myths and values that are present in some television programs remain attractive for Russians today?; 4) Is it possible to find symptoms of cultural trauma in certain television programs? In what television genres are these most pronounced? However, first, let us attempt to provide working definitions for what we understand to be Russian collective identity and Soviet values.

## COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

The idea of collective identity is one of the primary notions upon which this research is based. For this article I will use the working definition provided by Boris Groys (Groys, 2003):

The question of cultural identity, in its contemporary interpretation, is a question about the past, about a pre-contemporary cultural tradition carried by people on their way to the contemporary world. One expects to find that the qualities of a tradition depend on the ethnic, or rather, national origin of its carries. However what a contemporary post-

Soviet Russian holds in the past is not a national cultural tradition interpreted in such way but communism, Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism.

During the Soviet period all the social institutions of the country were involved in shaping the collective identity following the clear-cut ideological strategy of the Communist Party. Among the basic principles of that period were “social justice (no one is left out), state paternalism (fatherly care provided by a strict but wise leader, the people as a small flock), internationalism (class feeling is primal, ethnic differences are secondary in importance), atheism (the majority’s belief that there is no God)” (Arhangelsky, 2006, p. 29). Two of these — social justice and state paternalism — are closely interlinked and continue to dominate the value systems of Russians. They make it possible for relations between the state and its citizens to be based on the analogy of the relationship between a father and his young children who need to be protected and have everything divided among them equally.

The majority of Russian people (those older than 30) were born in the USSR, studied in Soviet schools and were, therefore, a part of the community of “Soviet people,” the world view of which included specific political and social myths produced by the ideological machine of the Communist party. Life stories of revolutionaries and record-setters in work productivity were supposed to create an image of a “new man,” “a true communist.” These stories were published in books and newspapers and were broadcast on television. They formed the basis for film scripts and dramas. By the mid-1980s much of the population that was middle-aged (those born in the 1930s-1940s) or younger no longer believed those myths but rather reacted to them irritation and disgust (Morozov, 2008).

Initially, perestroika and the disintegration of the USSR were welcomed by many of the “Soviet people.” However, with the passage of time the same people began to view this as a serious social and cultural trauma. With the collapse of state institutions, the former “Soviet community” was left to itself in creating a new identity. State institutions, including the media, functioned in an ideological vacuum. A large number of Western (mostly Hollywood) movies and Western programs that were transmitted on an everyday basis disseminated new values and models of behavior. However, the values of a consumerist society did not gel well with Soviet values and the undeveloped civil society in Russia. By the end of the 1990s people were disillusioned and critical of government policies that were aimed at shaping a pro-European identity. This enabled the new Russian government (V. Putin in particular) to change the state’s strategy at the beginning of a new century and to return to the model of a paternalist state (Putin, 2005). Russia’s state channels — never free from state pressure — supported new government policies. As a result, various television shows began to rehabilitate the Soviet past through the use of recycled old Soviet myths.

Nowadays, when the state ideologists show keen interest towards Soviet themes it is easy to explain the curiosity relating to all things Soviet that is expressed by the younger generation born after the disintegration of the USSR. Moreover, the interest in Sovietness

is partly motivated by a protest against the cultural unification that has been driven by globalization. Many Russians consider themselves neither prepared nor willing to conform to the standards of Western society, and they view the Soviet heritage as a sign of their uniqueness. The individualism of contemporary culture is set in opposition to the spirit of Soviet collectivism; activity and the drive to succeed are contrasted with passivity and obedience to one's fate; self-reliance and responsibility for one's future with state paternalism, etc. Such a shift in priorities could not help but affect the psychological state both of individual people and the society as a whole. Neither former Soviet people nor the Russian government could ignore this clash between old and the new values.

I would argue that the imagery and the models of behavior disseminated by Soviet television remain important to the majority of Russians (i.e., the majority of television viewers who were born, brought up and educated in the USSR). At the same time, the attitude toward the Soviet past remains ambiguous and as a result of cultural trauma contains elements of both love and hate. The following section analyzes the reasons behind the popularity of some programs and attempts to present a chronology of the various interpretations of the Soviet past. These stages will be linked to, and illustrate, the aggravation of cultural trauma.

## SYMPTOMS OF CULTURAL TRAUMA AND RUSSIAN TELEVISION

### Stage One — the Euphoria of Perestroika

For many citizens of the former USSR perestroika and the disintegration of the Soviet state constituted a collective traumatic experience that was reinforced by media representations of social and political realities. Television and movie screens were dominated by programs and films depicting the Soviet way of life in a negative light. One of the best examples is the documentary *We Can't Live Like This (Tak zhit' nel'zia)* by S. Govorukhin (1990). It blamed the state for the annihilation of the Russian people through humiliation and turning them into alcoholics and criminals. Govorukhin created a panorama of everyday "real" life: the indifferent faces of murderers, a poor policeman who shared a room with his two children, alcoholics, prostitutes, even the Patriarch Alexey II whose remarks were taken out of context and made to sound like an accusation. The film echoed a shared belief that it was necessary to destroy the myth of Soviet Union in order to build a new, democratic Russia on its ruins. The director later admitted: "We were shooting at Soviet power but shot Russia." "Shot the people," one could add. During this period many authors were driven by a desire to "tell the truth," and in this process intensified the cultural trauma experienced by people in the 1990s.

The symptoms of cultural trauma are confirmed by an analysis of television programs from that time. According to Sztompka (2008, pp. 484-485) television in the late 1980s to the early 1990s exhibited an acute *moral panic* (visible in heated mass debates, and the mobilization of an excessive number of social movements) and a high level of *anxiety* (heightened agitation and a belief in myths and rumors). This “moral panic” was clearly demonstrated in numerous political commentary programs, beginning with the program *Vzgliad* (*The Gaze*), a popular television program of the Central TV Channel, broadcast from 1987. It was intended for a young audience and was supposed to present music and entertainment, but during perestroika it soon turned to political commentaries. Its young and democratic presenters discussed burning issues that had been ignored by Soviet television for many years. The history of new Russian journalism is agreed to have started with *Vzgliad*. In turn, television shows involving media “psychotherapists” A. Kashpirovsky (a Ukrainian and Russian psychotherapist who became famous in the late 1980s through his television sessions of psychotherapy), and A. Chumak (a television journalist and a faith healer, who became famous in the late 1980 through the television sessions when he “charged” water, creams and ointments “with energy”) were supposed to reduce the high levels of anxiety. In fact, they only exacerbated the situation.

### Stage Two — Irony against the Background of Social Depression

From the mid-1990s onwards the symptoms of cultural trauma on Russian television have been increasing. The mass rejection of the past was replaced by the “*syndrome of nostalgia*,” which was often expressed through irony. One of the most original television projects about the Soviet Union of that period was the series of programs *The Other Day. Our Era* (*Namedni. Nasha era*) 1961-1991 by Leonid Parfenov (NTV, 1997). Archival materials and the grotesque comments of the presenter portrayed both the Soviet rulers and ordinary citizens as either simple-minded or eccentric. Parfenov’s program was imbued with a deep feeling of contempt and the sense that contemporary Russians ought to feel superior to their predecessors and even to how they themselves were a decade before.

Apart from Parphenov’s program, a number of popular shows utilized irony in their analyses of the Soviet past. One example was a documentary series *Contemporary History* (*Noveishaia istoriia*) by a group of journalists headed by Eugeny Kiselev. The authors of these programs scoured recently opened archives for sensational documents and newsreels to expose crimes of the Soviet past. For instance, one episode in this series was entitled *World Revolution for Comrade Stalin* (*Mirovaia revoliutsiia dlia tovarishcha Stalina*) (NTV, 1999). In the episode the journalists and guest historians tried to prove that World War II might have been initiated by Stalin had Hitler not done so first.

At the same time as these exposé programs were being aired, the state channels began to broadcast programs of a completely different ideological orientation — ones full of

nostalgia. One example is the musical program *Old Songs about What's Most Important* (*Starye pesni o glavnom*) that was aired on ORT in 1995. Probably for the first time a post-Soviet television show depicted the Soviet past not as an object of criticism or irony but rather referred to it as “a lost paradise.” On New Year’s Eve (when the majority of Russian citizens can be found in front of television screens) the audience watched contemporary Russian pop-singers performing Soviet hits and posing as characters from various Soviet films. One of the numerous messages of this masquerade was that Soviet songs, unlike contemporary ones, spoke about *what’s important*, which was not love — although the majority of songs were about love — but the *belief in a bright future*. According to this program, the aspect of the Soviet world-view that most retained its magnetism was its optimistic relationship towards the future. Viewers of New Year musicals with primitive plot-lines did not miss Communist ideology or collective farms, but rather they longed for a miracle or a dream and the hope that tomorrow would be better than today.

The show *Old Songs about What's Most Important* ran from 1995-2000 — with consecutive episodes broadcast to high ratings on New Year Eve — and set the tone for the first decade of Russian television in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The syndrome of nostalgia for the past “accompanied by idealization of the activities of a group identified as one’s own in order to overcome a crisis situation” (Sztompka, 2008, pp. 484-485) has been exploited by various television programs over the past ten years. Here “one’s own group” evidently consists of everyone who was born in the USSR, all brought together by their favourite songs. Gradually ironic interpretations of the pop-music of the past disappeared. Various channels began to broadcast programs that tapped into an interest in the past. Such programs turned into a kind of escapism.

### Stage Three — Retreat into the Soviet Past in Search of Entertainment

Russian television in the early 2000s, with its cult of entertainment and escapism, continued to signal to viewers that the nation’s balance had been disrupted. The ice-dancing shows *Stars on Ice* (*Zvezdyna l’du*), *Dancing on Ice* (*Tantsy na l’du*), *Ice Period* (*Lednikovyi period*) as well as *Old Songs about What's Most Important* invoked to the emotional charge of Soviet hit songs and Soviet sport victories. However, they could not protect viewers from the fear of instability and the feeling of insecurity.

Currently central television channels display all the symptoms of trauma usually listed by sociologists: skepticism or “*the absence of trust*” (the motif of distrust toward social institutions and particular citizens is often present in journalists’ comments and interviews), a “*syndrome of apathy*” (the refusal to vote in elections, for example), “*living in the present*” (clearly visible in entertainment and especially reality shows), “*nostalgia for the past*” (my article is dedicated to this topic so it will be discussed in detail below), “*anxiety*” and “*the syndrome of moral panic*” (mentioned above).

In the following section I will analyse the current situation in greater detail. This is of particular importance as many analysts, including Russian President Medvedev (Medvedev, 2009), agree that Russia is ready to close the period of history that still feeds on the legacy of the Soviet past. The implication is that television ought to change its content in order to further the modernising processes in Russian society. However, this has not been happening so far. On the contrary, the state television channels currently exhibit a variety of approaches in dealing with the Soviet past, and these approaches were formulated at the above mentioned stages and resulted from cultural trauma.

## SOVIETNESS AND TELEVISION

The theme of “Sovietness” is readily exploited on Russian television. Old Soviet films, documentaries bringing the viewers back to the events and key figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and contemporary television shows recycle various myths and images of the Soviet reality.

### Songs of the Soviet past

During the Soviet period people often felt dissatisfied with the Soviet entertainment industry and, in particular, with pop music (Dukov, 2004). For many people, Western pop music was more appealing. In the current period, however, television ratings point toward an opposite trend in which old Soviet songs are quite popular.

During the television season of 2009, Channel One and Channel Rossiia continued to advance the “Sovietization” of programming. They came up with two very similar (and very popular) musical shows — *Public Heritage (Dostoianie respubliki)* and *The Best Years of Our Life (Lushchie gody nashei zhizni)*. (In the first one the Soviet songs are discussed by two different generations: Soviet and post-Soviet, modern young people. Both generations agreed to appreciate the values inherent in the Soviet songs, their ideal melody, lyrics, etc.). These shows are constructed in such way as to make members of the audience in the studio and the viewers at home feel connected. The audience can vote for their favourite years, songs and thus share their memories with others. These shows were aired over several months, creating an illusion of returning to the past and living there. Old films and television series create a similar sense of audience involvement.

Old films — an integral part of Soviet mythology — are meant to remind contemporary viewers of the forgotten or mythical merits of Soviet life. In the 1980s the majority of those films (which unimaginatively followed the official ideological narrative) irritated the educated segments of the audience, many of whom who were disillusioned with Soviet values (Salnikova, 2008). Today many people have forgotten about this. Years of economic instability overshadowed the negative sides of Soviet life in many people’s



memories (Levada, 2006, p. 263-364). The idyllic view of Soviet everyday life that was typical for films made under the strict control of communist censorship now seems truthful even to those who should have remembered those years well. In the following section I will look at the place these films occupy in today's broadcasting in Russia.

### Soviet Movies and Films about the Soviet Past

Nowadays state television channels do not air Soviet movies as often as they did ten years ago. The television and cinema industry produces soap operas and programming for all tastes, satisfying the demands of television producers. Soviet movies are more often to be found on the niche channels (for example "Nostalgia"). However, on public holidays and during important political events viewers are being reminded that "in flesh and blood" their origins are Soviet. Hardly anyone in Russia was surprised when *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (*Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny*), a mini-series (12 episodes) by the director T. Lioznova (1973) based on the novel by J. Semenov<sup>5</sup> was shown on Victory Day (the end of the World War II in Europe) on 10 May 2005 on NTV. However, the creation of a colour remake with updated dubbing (May 2009, Rossiia) provoked a heated debate, both among critics and television viewers. Furthermore, in an attempt to capitalize on the cult-status of *Seventeen Moments of Spring* the filmmakers have produced a contemporary television drama *Isaev* that revolves around the youth of its main character — Stirlitz. The film attempts to actualize myths and Soviet values from as far back as the revolution and the civil strife and continuing up to World War II.

Similarly, the day of the October Revolution of 1917, celebrated on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November (the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution) was first renamed as the Day of Consent and Reconciliation (1996) and was then cancelled altogether (2004). In the 1990s the White Movement was exonerated, but in the drama *Isaev*, based on the work by J. Semenov, all members of the White Guard whom Isaev had to contact as a Communist secret agent are depicted as being just as unidimensional as they were during the Soviet period. It is also noteworthy that the images of the Germans in the drama the *Seventeen Moments of Spring* were not so wry. In the interpretations of contemporary scriptwriters and/or authors of documentaries, the heroes of the past often follow the logic of today. This is justified since the mentality of Russians has changed so dramatically over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that an ordinary viewer would struggle to understand the people of earlier periods. Moreover, an attempt at serious interpretation may not produce high ratings or be

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<sup>5</sup>The main character, Standartenfuehrer Stirlitz (played by V. Tikhonov), a Soviet spy, received an order to find out who of the leaders of the German Reich was conducting separate peace negotiations with the USA and UK.

as entertaining. Perhaps because of this, the events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are often presented in the context of adventures or melodramas.

It is also important to note that a television format can exert a long-term influence over its viewers and their involvement in the lives of fictional characters. Watching a historical series makes the audience feel as if they are returning to some time in the past and living there for a while.

Myths about the Soviet past have more applications in Russian television today than as just a reminder of a lost paradise. The same audience, having enjoyed the nostalgia of the past, is prepared to watch a program that exposes the crimes of the Soviet period and is intended to provide shock value. In fact, old Soviet myths are not used in their original form but rather as self-parodies. Rather than serving as models for builders of communism, characters from the Soviet past are turned into the personification of all human vices.

### Exposure as Entertainment

In 2009 NTV, the channel that aired Parfenov's program in 1997, presented a new talk-show in which the "*NTVshniki*" — a group of the channel's hosts (men in their thirties and forties) — debated with guests politicians (men in their sixties and seventies, predominantly Communists) and the role of Stalin in the life of contemporary Russia. This program, entitled *Stalin is with Us!* (broadcast on 20/12/009) tried to determine whether Stalinism today means "us giving the finger to the West." The "Elders" — traditionalists — supported the case of Stalin:

V. Kvachkov (a retired colonel of Main Intelligence Directorate, a politician and public figure): "Stalinism today is Russian Orthodox socialism."

N. Kharitonov (a member of the State Duma who belongs to the Communist party of the Russian Federation): "If one continues to make programs from the point of view of the victims of repressions nothing good will happen to the country."

This program was broadcast during prime time (Sunday at 20.20) and drew a good rating. Its share in Moscow was 17.5% with a rating of 7.5% and throughout the country — 16.6% (rating of 7.3%). But the public debates in the media and on the internet that were triggered by this program consisted of insults being traded between Stalin's opponents and proponents; they showed once again that discussion of the Soviet past does not lead to public consensus and only creates tensions. It did not help viewers to overcome their collective trauma. The Soviet past continues to provoke emotional outbursts and thus helps television channels to create the illusion of functioning as a platform for debate.

Documentaries on the history of Russia constitute yet another subject of interest. Their analysis reveals the ambiguous nature of the contemporary self-identification of Russians. The most popular genre is biographies of various historical figures that formed the basis of Soviet mythology. The “Sovietness” of contemporary documentaries is mitigated by the need to entertain and attract the widest possible audience. For example, the documentary *Greetings from Koba (Privet ot Koby)*<sup>6</sup> (Channel One), aired at the beginning of 2009, is a crime story depicting the pre-revolutionary period and criminal activities of Stalin. Such docu-biographies are often melodramatic and tend to diverge from the documented chain of events. This is done in order to reveal the character’s personality and entertain the audience with various rumors and myths involving political figures and actors, as well as to connect different stories without commitment to any sort of internal logic.

For instance, one recent episode (November 2009) in the series *Soviet Biographies (Sovetskie biografii)* on NTV was dedicated to Sergey Kirov (Sergey Kostrikov (pseudonym Kirov, 1886-1937) — a revolutionary and a Soviet politician). It is based on striking but often unverified details of Kirov’s life and sometimes on pure conjecture. Here we find Kirov’s strained relationship with his father, his mother’s early death from (alcohol?) consumption, a charity that had invested a considerable amount of money in the education of a talented boy who later repaid his benefactors by stealing a machine from a factory (the property of the same charitable organization). As Stalin’s supporter Kirov shot thousands of people and, according to the version presented in the film, was then killed by the jealous husband of his own secretary. Neither the authors of the documentary nor the viewers are supposed to question the authenticity of these shocking revelations.

*Soviet Biographies* could be seen as an attempt to reinterpret the Soviet past: not to justify or to condemn it but to understand it and to use this new knowledge to overcome the cultural trauma. In the above-mentioned film about Kirov one can sense the authors’ desire not only to bring together peculiar biographical details but to illustrate the epoch through his personality, to understand why a boy brought up in the Church orphanage later, as a revolutionary, authorized shooting at a church procession and killing the priests. However, these key moments are overshadowed by unnecessary details. As a result we get a schema of a Soviet person, not a deep psychological portrait. There was a similar attempt to unveil the myth of Vasily Chapayev<sup>7</sup>. It was undertaken in the film *Chapay is with Us (Chapai s nami)*, which was broadcast in November 2009 on the Channel One. However, the main

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<sup>6</sup>Koba is another pseudonym of Joseph Jughashvili (alias Stalin).

<sup>7</sup>Vasily Chapayev (1887-1919) is a famous Red Army commander. The movie became highly popular in the Soviet Union, which made the main characters of the movie, Vasilii Ivanovich (Chapayev), his messenger Pet’ka, and machine-gunner An’ka one of the most popular heroes of Russian short jokes and anecdotes.

message was lost in numerous conflicts and plotlines that prevented the viewer from reflecting on the past and coming to any kind of reconciliation with it.

By ceaselessly rewriting Russian history, referring to the same characters and digging up ever more shocking and historically unsubstantiated details in their biographies, the creators of films such as those mentioned above hinder society's progress in overcoming cultural trauma. Analysis of the past should illuminate the dangers of repeating mistakes; otherwise historical anecdotes turn into profitable commercial attractions and demonstrate a society's disrespect towards its ancestors.

So far Russian television has not succeeded in using history in order to unite the nation. This was clearly demonstrated by an ambitious show *Russia: the Name (Imia Rossia)*, which was broadcast on the channel Rossiia. It was adapted from a British program (*Greatest Britons*, BBC, 2002), the rights to which were purchased by Rossiia. The original title of the program was not preserved, and the new title — *Russia: the Name* — was pretentious and grammatically incorrect. What is important here is that the show's name included the name of the television channel, with focus placed on the fact that the word "name" was in the singular form. The program lost its polyphony as well as its educational message, thus being descending into political propaganda and a process of selecting only one name that could unite Russians and lead them to a bright future.

At the preliminary stage of the biography clips the viewers were presented with simplified information about the main characters. The logic was schematized and was adjusted to archetypical schemes. The presentation and format remained simplified (clip-portrait of a "hero," his presentation by his "advocate" and a studio debate between these "advocates"). However, the evaluation given in the clips-portraits as well as the remarks by the presenter predetermined the viewers' reactions. V. Ulyanov-Lenin was compared to a Pharaoh, P. Stolypin was said to be "worthy" (the clip began by with the following quotation: "In ordinary times it is the well-connected and satisfied who move forward, but in times of crisis — the worthy ones"). A. Suvorov was referred to as "a true musketeer," while Stalin was a "tyrant."

During the television debates the advocates of "Great Russians" discussed the problems of contemporary Russia. They did not talk about history, but rather about the present and the future. It was a discussion of values slightly camouflaged by the biographies of historical figures. The mere choice of stars as historical advocates made it possible to predict the outcome of the public voting. Their public reputation lent support to their "heroes." In other words, the popularity of the public figure who presented a particular "hero" was the key predictor of how many votes that historical figure would receive.

Metropolitan Cyril of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (Now Patriarch Cyril) presented Alexander Nevsky; Victor Chernomyrdin (a laureate of the Peter the Great Award (2002) "for his valuable contribution to the establishment of Russian state") — Peter I; Nikita Mikhalkov (a film director and the President of the Russian Society of Cinematographers)

— P. Stolypin; Gennady Zyuganov (a politician, the Chairman of the Union of Communist Parties) — Lenin; Valentine Varennikov (a retired general, a member of the State Duma) — Stalin.

The authors of the program certainly understand the process, which comes to the fore when the host A. Liubimov (the author and host of the project *Russia: the Name*) provided commentary on the results: “I think that the high position of Stolypin in the final rating is connected to the popularity of Nikita Mikhalkov and his persuasiveness.” Moreover, the program was influenced by Mikhalkov’s film *12* (a remake of the famous movie by Sidney Lumet *Twelve Angry Men*). The movie’s plot is based on a jury deliberating on its verdict in the case of a Chechen boy who is suspected of murdering his foster father. In the film the trial of a Chechen boy is turned into the trial of contemporary Russia, of the people and the authorities. In the program *The Name of Russia*, the authorities (represented by the “advocates”) put themselves on trial. It was as if they were sending society a message: “We know that all this time we led you to catastrophe. Now we are prepared to change the destination.” However the vote demonstrated that no new avenues for nation building have appeared. The image of the national hero (Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky) bears no relevance to the problems of contemporary Russia. The myth of a Prince-saviour is so old that it could hardly push the country towards modernization. On the other hand, it supports the paternalistic sentiments of the audience.

However, these programs are not the only ones dealing with cultural trauma on Russian television today. In the following section I will present a detailed analysis of an entertainment show that aims at changing the viewers’ stereotypes concerning fashion and family relations (and sometimes does it by “exploiting” the ongoing conflict between Soviet and contemporary values).

## FROM CHANGES IN APPEARANCE TO A CHANGE IN WORLD VIEW

During the Soviet period Russia viewers got used to television presenting models for what was to be imitated in life. Today they are clearly lacking positive figures that come not from the past but from contemporary Russian life. People are forced to choose between Soviet values and the values of a consumerist society while feeling that the former are outdated and the latter do not conform to the important aspects of traditional Russian culture.

This is especially obvious in the show *Fashion Verdict* (*Modnyi prigovor*) on Channel One. The clash of Soviet fashion and norms with contemporary ones is reflected in its overall style (cheap, clean, modest), the way of life promoted (work and care of others are all-important, and to love oneself is inappropriate, if not downright wrong), and it is strengthened by the remarks of the (co)hosts. The fashion designer, Viacheslav Zaitsev, is the face of Soviet fashion. In the program he is an authority, a judge who can afford to be

both extravagant and traditionalist (even old-fashioned). The co-presenters personify the two value systems: E. Khromchenko symbolizes the standards of consumerist society, and A. Sharapova — traditional values (traditional family, and other values interlinked with Soviet ones). The “Soviet passivity” of Sharapova’s interpretation is seen as an ability to aspire for a distant goal and to protect traditions: “One could hardly reject what he strived for many years. And if he found freedom in body building, he has his right to happiness” (03/09/2009); “through clothes one can remain invisible or attract attention. But sincerity is the only way to attract attention and to earn the love of the people around you” (08/09/2009); “Do not rush to get rid of all old things. Perhaps your daughter would be happy later to put on your old dress” (27/10/2009).

The protagonists (typically female ones) were brought up in the tradition of Soviet paternalism, which, intertwined with the standards of the “American dream,” was widespread in Russia in the 1990s. The edition broadcast on November 24, 2009 posed the question of “where to find a true man?” Its participant (36 years old) is married for the third time. Her current marriage looks like all previous ones — her husband does not participate in family affairs, she takes care of the household and four children and has a job. She is tired of this but cannot change the situation and herself. The situation is typical for the Soviet-type family in which a woman carries the burden without complaining. At the same time, there are some contemporary elements (three marriages and four children). The heroine is stuck between the two life-styles — she wears American-style trainers, jeans and jumpers, but behaves in a traditional way: “Sveta has disappeared completely in her beloved husband and indulges him a lot. First she prevents him from helping her in the household, and then she feels that it is hard to carry the burden on her own.” The desire to serve others selflessly goes back both to Soviet and Orthodox traditions. This ambiguity leads other participants of the discussion to rather harsh comments.

Another protagonist (08/09/2009, “The Case of a Mouse with a Strong Character”) is 28. She is from a family of serviceman: “From childhood she embraced the notion that men are to be honored and obeyed, but that the head of family could be manipulated if necessary. She was always proud of her school nickname ‘mouse’.” The image is chosen accordingly: long denim skirts, old-fashioned glasses and a ponytail. She knows how to make people respect hers. However, she rejected leadership positions for the sake of her loved one, since “bossy overtones” could damage the relationship. During the discussion the heroine defends the Soviet value system that she was brought up in (even though she could hardly remember it). But the author of the program stressed that she comes from a family of servicemen. She was brought up within a subculture that was more steeped in Soviet traditions than many other subcultures in Russia. The girl used to admire men and to view herself not as an object of admiration but as a man’s friend and assistant. The experts and participants respect this, but they also point out a dissonance in her life:

The participant: "I never tried to stand out through my clothes."

Her friend Irene: "Masha wears the clothes that not every old woman would choose to wear."

Her fiancé Paul: "At the same time she is an interesting and intelligent person. She needs bright colours to reflect her personality."

Her friend Tatyana: "Masha's success is unusual. She does not attract men with her looks but rather by her charm and intellect."

Eveline Khromchenko: "In order to keep hold of a man, a woman needs to demonstrate various outfits, try new styles and play different roles."

The more the heroine resists the change, the harder the others try to persuade her. They even appeal to the host's authority: "A woman's wardrobe should be diverse. It is dangerous to choose just one color or one style, one cut. You risk being left behind in the past." To live for oneself, not for a family; to search for happiness regardless of how old you are; not to bury oneself in work; to reject stereotypes — these "messages" are often repeated in the program.

But to change one's style of dress and to learn to love oneself does not mean overcoming cultural trauma and learning to live in light of contemporary challenges. Viewers will not learn these things from a fashion designer on a talk show or from the President on the national news programs. It requires the combined effort of the state and intellectuals, including journalists (reporters, television host, etc.). At the moment there are no prerequisites for such a process in contemporary Russia. Here television does not create the space for a functioning civil society or a new collective identity. It is just playing with myths and facts and distracts the viewers from today's problems and, in the process, profits from these problems.

## CONCLUSION

The condition of cultural trauma experienced by Russian society (the audience of national television) resulted from the collapse of the USSR and perestroika. For two decades television has reflected the ongoing conflict between Soviet, democratic and consumerist values which has prevented the people and the country from choosing a path for further development. In this article I investigated the changing dynamics of popular state television channels' approaches to Soviet myths and values. I have identified several stages: that of the euphoria of perestroika, that of the irony that came against the background of social depression, that of escapism (a return to the Soviet past in search of entertainment). The approach towards Soviet myths was never uniform in Russia during any of these stages. It combined nostalgia for the illusions of the past with irony. It can be felt now when the country is once again faced with which nation building strategy to follow.

Television viewers cannot overcome the condition of cultural trauma by themselves; for them television has ceased to be a means for social discussion and is seen exclusively as a source of entertainment. This need for entertainment is satisfied by music shows and series that use familiar Soviet mythology. At the same time this Soviet mythology loses the pathos of revolutionary struggle, and old myths acquire new meanings. The interactivity and prolonged viewing time of some shows and television series enable audiences to sink into a world of illusions. It helps to strengthen the intangible sentiments of the majority, making them passive and easily manipulated. Thus, it can be concluded that today Russian television does not perform its social functions and does not help to form a collective identity. It simply exploits Soviet myths and the myths of consumerist society, plays with the viewers' emotions, and uses any means necessary to attract viewers and make a profit.

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## FORUM

# DAILY TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF ISLAMISM AS SECURITY THREAT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (RUSSIA, FRANCE, BRITAIN)

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The discussion that follows is based around online and offline conversations held within a research team in order to help summarise some of the key points arrived at in a recent 3-year project consisting of a comparative study of European television news representations of Islam as a security threat. The countries selected for comparison were Russia, the UK and France, each of which has some level of involvement with the so-called War on Terror (WoT) and significant Muslim populations, but different political systems and media cultures. In each case, we looked at the daily news output of channels considered close to the official national position on the WoT - Russia's Channel 1, BBC1, and France 2 — though, except in Russia's case, none of them can be considered as "state broadcasters." The bulletins in question were Channel 1's *Vremia*, the BBC's *Ten o'Clock News*, and France 2's *Journal de 20 Heures*. Recordings made in alternate 3-month blocks over two years (November 2006 to November 2008) were archived, catalogued, and annotated according

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to a broad set of Islam-related categories. The data formed the basis for a set of statistical analyses we produced in order to orient ourselves within the landscape of intersecting issues covered, and to provide an overview of trends in each channel's approach to those issues. Reports falling into the relevant categories were then transcribed in full and submitted to analysis according to qualitative and quantitative methods derived from Political Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis and Cultural Studies.

We were interested in answering many more questions than we have space to discuss here. Several had to do with the way in which the bulletins managed the daily flow of stories about terrorism and security threats — many of which inevitably had links, direct and indirect, to the rise of radical Islam — in the context of their prominent public roles and responsibilities within nations hosting Muslim minority communities. It is this encounter of the cumulative and reiterative dimensions of “everyday news,” with the responsibilities of public service and national state broadcasters to foster national cohesion, which links the questions to the theme of our special issue.

In presenting the questions, and suggesting answers to them, we make no attempt to organise them as a formal scholarly analysis, with references, supporting data and structured arguments. For that, we would refer readers to our forthcoming monograph due out in 2011 with Palgrave. In the spirit of the “forum” format as we interpret it, we respond informally and spontaneously, aware that we are dealing in broad generalisations, and conscious that we may, at times, be articulating points that are in tension with one another, or raise new questions and doubts. We hope, nonetheless, that the discussion proves interesting, provocative and fruitful.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. HOW PROMINENT A DAILY PRESENCE ON THE MAIN TELEVISION NEWS BULLETIN ARE STORIES DEALING WITH ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN RUSSIA/France/THE UK?

#### Russian Channel I

This is actually quite tricky to answer, since, whilst a substantial portion of news items on *Vremia* deal with situations and conflicts involving Muslims, other than in international coverage, there is a concerted effort to avoid mentioning the faith of those involved in terrorism and associated separatist violence within the Russian Federation. This has partly to do with a residual fear of stoking secessionist tendencies in Russia's Muslim regions, and partly with quelling a backlash against Muslim migrants amongst provincial and urban Russians by invoking the Soviet-style “multicultural, multifaith society” mantra.

Russian viewers are treated now to a daily trickle of reports on bombs, killings of ethnic Russians and attacks on Russian property, personnel and security officials in the Caucasus (particularly Ingushetia). But until recently there has been virtually no referencing of Islam, other than through the odd mention of “Wahabbism” in order to emphasise the foreign provenance of the ideology motivating the violence. More often than not the violence is “criminalised” and the perpetrators referred to as *prestupniki* (criminals). However the terms *boeviki* (militants), *terroristy* (terrorists) and even *khuligany* (vandals) are also found; the slippage between them indicates the confusion and incoherence in the channel’s discursive policy towards Islam and terror. Particularly unfortunate, perhaps, is the euphemism *Kavkaztsy* (Caucasians) which has the effect of associating an entire region with terrorist insurgency, and of ethnicising the conflict, to the severe detriment of social cohesion throughout Russia. Nonetheless, since Medvedev assumed the Russian presidency, *Vremia* reporting on the North Caucasus has attempted to echo a shift in emphasis in Kremlin policy, towards addressing the socio-economic causes driving young Muslims into the hands of religious extremists. Inevitably, this has led to an increase in the portrayal of Muslim communities, and a more sympathetic line in depicting those drawn to support the terrorist militants. The more analytical and sensitive approach has led to a contemporary “media” version of the Leninist policy of *korenizatsiia* (the “rooting” of central power in non-Russian regions by appointing local officials at the highest levels) and reports on the North Caucasus region tend to be led by reporters with local knowledge, and feature interviewees of local origin. On occasion, as a result of this policy, inconvenient and quite bold statements slip through the net, as when, in a 2008 report on the aftermath of a battle with extremists who imposed Sharia law on a Dagestani village, a local academic called for greater freedom of the press and more independent courts as part of the solution to the problems.

## France 2

Unsurprisingly, given the lack of domestic terror incidents on French soil in recent years, our statistics reveal France 2 features the least amount of coverage of terrorism with an Islamic dimension. France’s relative distance from the Anglo-American position on the WoT has also entailed a slightly more critical attitude to the allies’ actions and strategy. On the other hand, perhaps because it has felt less need when reporting on the WoT to take into account the sensibilities of its Muslim population, which has not been explicitly implicated in supporting terrorist activities, France 2 shows less circumspection than BBC1 in swiftly applying the ideologically loaded term “Islamiste” to events and actors whose links to the WoT, or to al Qaeda, have yet to be confirmed. (Alternatively, the term could be argued to allow for clearer distinctions to be drawn between the broad mass of “moderate Muslims” and the small minority of “Islamist” extremists). More recently, France has become concerned by the emergence of a North African branch of al Qaeda which threatens its

former colonial territories, and, indirectly, inter-ethnic cohesion in France itself. Reports on bombings in Algeria and Morocco are far more implicitly condemnatory towards the perpetrators than those on Islamic terrorism in, say, the UK, where the thrust of the reporting is sometimes more towards identifying the international and socio-economic causes of the events (here France 2 provides the reverse mirror image of BBC1, which has been prone to adopt a similarly “analytical” approach to North Africa; each nation, it would seem, is fighting its own distinct WoT).

Whilst domestic terrorism barely features in France 2 news, some attention is given to the “problems” caused by Muslim extremism at the cultural level, and to threats posed to France’s secular society by religious fanatics. Stories of Muslim intimidation of intellectuals who have spoken out against the conservatism of the Qu’ran, and particularly, of challenges to French approaches to gender equality, also feature. The trial of the French publication, *Charlie Hebdo*, in 2006, for reprinting the infamous Danish cartoons of Mohammed, was extensively treated and, whilst ostensibly presenting the story in terms of a debate between proponents of “free speech” and defenders of religious sensitivities, the *Journal de 20 Heures* bulletin skirted the danger of skewing the argument by repeating *Hebdo*’s original “misdemeanour” and reproducing some of the offending cartoons in its own coverage (something which neither BBC1 nor Channel 1 chose to do). Debates over the Muslim headscarf, a theme which circulates across the entire European media landscape, are especially prevalent in France, one of the primary origins of the issue. Also of note is a sequence of grim and sometimes indignant reports about attacks by Islamic extremists on male hospital staff tasked with treating Muslim women. France’s minimal active experience of the WoT places less onus on it than on the other two broadcasters to articulate the relationship between the actions of domestic Muslim radicals, and those of the global terror movement (the former are framed in terms of intra-societal cohesion rather than international/national security). However, the problem of finding suitably engaging, yet appropriately sensitive, narratives to mediate the domestic and the global dimensions to the WoT is one with which all three channels struggle.

## BBC 1

Unsurprisingly, a huge portion of BBC reporting during our monitoring period concentrated on events in Iraq, which was one of the states listed in George Bush’s initial declaration of a WoT. It is indeed a largely Muslim country and, as confirmed only recently by the former head of Britain’s MI5, there is little doubt that the chaos in post-invasion Iraq has led to an influx of al Qaeda extremists who have taken advantage of the Sunni/Shia divide which continues to destabilise the country, and to a growth in Muslim radicalism in the UK. However, a report on chaos in Iraq does not necessarily amount to a report focusing, or even touching, on Islam. Much of the recent BBC coverage has tended to highlight

problems with the post-Iraq strategy followed by the US-led alliance, Britain's controversial role in sanctioning the invasion, and on the failure to identify Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. The tone has often been sceptical, if not critical, of western policy, rather than targeted at the threat of Islamist extremism. Particularly when making generalisations based on quantitative surveys aimed at assessing a broadcaster's level of "obsession" with Islam, we thus attempted to avoid the danger of labelling an event as Islam-related merely by virtue of the fact that it takes place in a nominally Muslim country. This can be tantamount to identifying people solely with their religion or cultural heritage when in fact their actions may be motivated by a whole array of other factors — the very attitude that leads to the stereotypical homogenising of Muslims in the first place. However, it can be argued that the sheer daily barrage of negativity associated with Iraq coverage is liable to reinforce viewer prejudice associating Muslims with violence and disruption. Then again, this is an unverified effect rather than a specific intent of BBC broadcasting policy and reflects the broader news values that the media adhere to (the emphasis on "bad news" and disruptions of normality over "good news" and the normative). It is precisely when trying to measure and evaluate coverage of recurring, quotidian events that methodological assumptions and precepts become so crucial. Afghanistan, also a consistent topic in BBC reporting, is more straightforward because of the prominence of the Taliban, and because of Afghanistan's status as origin of the 9/11 attacks.

On the domestic side, the BBC also devoted large amounts of air time to threats and acts of Muslim-inspired terrorism. In Britain, viewers have been treated to a weekly, if not daily, menu of terror plots, stories of the radicalisation of young Muslim lads (a topic which acquired a consistent narrative shape), terror arrests, trials and sentences, extremist preachers, accounts of the deleterious effects of *sharia* law, and so on. To be fair to the BBC, it was meticulous in attempting not to make pre-emptive assumptions in the case of arrests of suspected terrorists, and to balance coverage of Muslim extremism, with trenchant reporting on Islamophobia (even supplying the video footage which led to the arrest of the leader of the British National Party for inflammatory, anti-Muslim comments — a decision which came back to haunt it when the suspect was found "not guilty"). Sometimes, however, the reporting procedures were inadvertently followed in such a way that they reinforced the sense of inevitability of Muslim "guilt" (as when carefully neutral, non-specific language about a terror arrest is undermined by a reference (either overt and verbal, or implicit and visual) to a significant Asian presence in the community where the arrest took place). The ethnicity/religious culture conflation effect (there is no inherent reason why "Asian" should necessarily mean "Muslim") was more of a feature on Russian Channel 1 than on the other two channels we analysed, but we noted sporadic instances here, too. What is certainly true of BBC1 is that, as scholars like David Altheide have argued, the news landscape has been subject to an incremental "securitisation" process in which Muslim radicalism, state terrorism, international crime, nationalist extremism, the "intrusive state" and other issues

are conflated. One associated problem, particularly in post 7/7 Britain, is the danger that Muslim radicalism becomes the dominant element in the chain, contaminating, and being contaminated by, the other links. Thus, in 2007 a British school teacher was sentenced to a public whipping in Sudan for naming a class teddy bear Muhammed — hardly an issue with profound security implications, but assigned to a BBC security correspondent, thus inflecting an isolated and relatively minor instance of “intercultural conflict” with the amorphous “security” agenda.

## 2. HOW DOES EACH BROADCASTER DEAL WITH THE IMPACT OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM ON STATE POLICY REGARDING INTER-ETHNIC AND INTERFAITH COHESION?

### Russian Channel I

The problem is that the “multicultural, multifait” formula adopted, somewhat in panic mode, by the Putin administration, has not been followed through consistently by the government itself. Putin has himself been shown at international press conferences allying Russia with other cultures “founded on a Christian heritage,” and at gatherings of party leaders, warning against alienating Russia’s “indigenous (*korennoe*) population” by failing to deal with the problems caused by (overwhelmingly Muslim) migrants. For a channel in a position of subservience to this confused agenda, and incapable either of fully internalising it, or of adopting a critical distance from it, this presents particular difficulties. There have been numerous examples of coverage in which incongruous statements drawn from different points in speeches have been edited together, to extremely jarring effect.

*Vremia* has developed a genre of report aimed at conveying a sense of normality in Chechnya (stories of mosques and churches being built with multi-faith support; new schools, hospitals etc). But there is little attempt to link this type of report with those depicting the constant spate of bombings in the same region. The other thing to note, however, is that the Kremlin and the Duma have passed several pieces of legislation targeting extremist activities. Whilst inclusive of Islamist separatist violence, this seems to have been conceived, at least initially, with Russian nationalist fringes in mind (urban Russia has been dogged by serious problems with assault on, and murders of, dark-skinned people of Caucasian origin, and often Muslim faith). Because, conveniently, the term “extremist” was never well defined, either at the level of state legislation, or through discussion and dissemination in the state-controlled media, it is now often used in reference to western-oriented liberal opponents of Kremlin policy. There are examples of the term being applied on *Vremia* in relation to the latter, and to Russian nationalists, as well as to Islamic fundamentalists in the Caucasus. The lack of differentiation, and the tendency of *Vremia*

reporters to adopt official rhetoric wholesale, adds further to the occlusion of the roots of Islamic terrorism.

However, by comparison with the quite shocking anti-Muslim comments to be heard on discussion shows in the aftermath of interethnic violence in the Karelian town of Kondopoga in 2006, *Vremia* was a model of moderation, endorsing a “politically correct” call for multicultural harmony. This, of course, is at odds with the liberal doses of condemnatory rhetoric in evidence when *Vremia* reports WoT activities abroad with which Russia wishes to associate itself, or which it deploys in polemic with its “hypocritical” western critics (June 2007 saw a lengthy *Vremia* exposé of London’s role as haven for international Islamist extremists in the wake of the Litvinenko dispute).

## France 2

France has remained resolutely committed to its constitutional settlement and to the principle of *laïcité* (secularism) which mandates not just a complete separation of religion and state but an insistence on maintaining a public sphere free of religious proselytising. Accompanying this principle is a rejection of *communautarisme* (the emphasis on the separateness of different ethnic and cultural communities), and of the Anglo-Saxon multiculturalist model with which it is associated. As a broadcaster partly dependent on state support, it is perhaps not surprising that France 2 tends to follow this line in its reporting. One clear tendency indicating this is the appearance on its evening news bulletin of reports profiling the lives of successfully assimilated Muslim individuals and families, proud of their religion and culture, but also of their Frenchness, and perfectly willing to keep their religion a private affair.

It would be quite wrong, however, to think of France 2 as a subservient state broadcaster; in many respects it retains a respectable neutrality and independence and attempts to provide balanced coverage of all the issues it reports. The adherence to *laïcité* is rather an indication of the degree to which the notion is ingrained within French public consciousness and forms part of France’s societal consensus. Coverage of stories involving (perceived) Muslim extremism sometimes betrays a tension between the two values: balance and *laïcité*. This is reflected in a form of “false parallelism” in which issues are presented in the form of a dichotomy whose two parts are actually contained within one side of the pairing. For example, a dispute over whether it is right to allow Muslim women to insist on separate public sports facilities is framed in terms of the question: “Should one show one’s willingness to be pragmatic, or stick firmly to one’s principles?” But, of course, a willingness to be pragmatic does not imply a deviation from the (republican, secularist) principle that what the women are demanding is wrong, merely a readiness to apply that principle less rigidly.

What is also apparent is that, whilst not a leading player in the WoT, France is, via one of its leading national television channels, not averse to using its republican principles to lay claim to being the key holder of the values behind the anti-terror alliance. A good illustration came in the 2008 coverage of the anniversary of 9/11 when, to mark the occasion, *Journal de 20 Heures* interviewed Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Dutch renegade Muslim feminist, now a target for Islamic extremists for her staunch defence of women's rights against oppressive Muslim practices. The climax of the interview came when, recalling the post-9/11 US mantra "We are all American now," Ali praises French endorsements of gender equality and defence of Muslim women, claiming "All oppressed women are French now." In fact, we discovered, the struggle for "ownership" of the "universality" underlying the case for the WoT had a distinctly "particularistic" flavour to it as each of the 3 broadcasters we studied at different times assimilated the internationalism supposedly driving the global anti-terror campaign to the national values and interests of the particular country it represented.

## BBC 1

Like France 2, the BBC has identified itself closely with what it perceives to be the British societal consensus on issues of inter-ethnic cohesion. Until relatively recently, this has meant a commitment to the policies of multiculturalism which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s following the waves of post second world war immigration from Britain's former colonies. However, the policies were never fully accepted across the mainstream political spectrum and have more recently been toned down or rejected in favour of a more assimilationist approach, partly in response to increasing concerns over the effects of immigration, and partly to the emergence of Muslim radicalism. BBC1 has struggled with the resulting tensions and its coverage of sensitive stories involving suspected (and actual) Muslim terrorism has, unsurprisingly, been riddled with contradiction. On one hand it displays, albeit inconsistently, a commitment to equal representation, both in terms of the reporters that it employs when covering inter-community tensions, and in its efforts to include the opinions of minority communities; *vox pop* reactions to terror plots often feature Asian voices, (usually, but not always, identified as Muslim) in the interests both of balance, and of emphasising the "moderate" attitudes of the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

Sometimes, however, the multiculturalist consensus promoted is of an attenuated, manufactured variety: a report on notions of "Britishness" in 2007, for example, included interviews with a Chinese woman from Edinburgh, an Asian from Birmingham, and a West Indian man from Cardiff, all of whom expressed enthusiasm for their Scottishness, Englishness and Welshness, rather than identifying with their ethnic communities. Moreover, the consensus has shifted in recent years. When it reported the acquittal of Nick Griffin, following a trial underpinned by video evidence which it had itself submitted (the video showed Griffin making Islamophobic pronouncements), the BBC was still hesitantly



multiculturalist in its practices. Only 2 years later, in 2009, when the multicultural consensus had declined further, it was eliciting charges of fuelling anti-Muslim feeling by inviting Griffin onto its *Question Time* program to give voice to his Islamophobic prejudices, albeit under sharp questioning (as a further sign of British Establishment confusion, in 2010 Buckingham Palace refused Griffin entry to a garden party, despite the fact that he was an elected MEP). The BBC news continues to feature the widest spectrum of voices, and its reporters are skilled in internalising those voices whilst retaining their original meanings. However, the manner in which they are framed often now indicates a tacking towards assimilationism; an otherwise pluralistic 2008 account of a government decision to twin tougher anti-terror legislation with a commitment to spend more on Muslim community projects concluded “The Government wants to reassure its own backbenchers that, when it comes to fighting extremism, it’s about carrot as well as stick.” “Backbenches” was a coded way of referring to the left-wing peripheries of a new consensus in which “toughness” on extremism overrides multiculturalist indulgences, and resources are allocated to minorities not for identity-building, but to ward off “radicalisation.”

### 3. WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH ON COVERAGE OF ISLAM TELL US ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BROADCASTER AND STATE?

#### Russian Channel I

Not surprisingly, *Vremia* sticks very closely to the line of the Kremlin under whose overbearing influence it finds itself. Because of its passive subservience, and because of fault lines and contradictions in the government thinking for which it is required to be the official mouthpiece, it offers the most contradictory account of Islam of all three national bulletins we studied. There is no attempt to assert a distance from policy statements, to pick them apart, or to reconcile tensions, since this would require a level of independence that *Vremia* does not have. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of anything remotely resembling a societal consensus on inter-ethnic issues which national television can attempt to position itself in relation to (something the BBC is much more adept at doing); as poll data reveals, the Russian population at large is almost certainly much more Islamophobic (or rather, anti-Caucasian) than the government and on occasions this is inadvertently allowed to contaminate *Vremia*’s reporting (as when a camera filming the sentencing of a mob guilty of racist violence is assailed by a crowd sympathetic to the convicted defendants).

At other times, the bulletin is deployed as a channel through which the Kremlin deliberately allows more robust variants on its own views to filter; the presenter of the opinion piece insert, “*Odnako*,” for example is often to be heard spouting virulent versions of the anti-western rhetoric which, in more moderate form, pervades official positions on the

US-led operations in Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The picture then, is one of the combination of a highly managed airing of Kremlin thinking on Islam, and an unmanaged trickle of unorthodox opinion which finds its way past, or is permitted to bypass, official Channel 1 gatekeepers; lacking the comfort of a Marxist-Leninist ideological framework, journalists are prone to veer off-message (the *Vremia* reporter who envelops formerly outré, now mainstreamed, anti-Caucasian xenophobe, Vladimir Zhirinovskii in a cloud of sarcasm for his “miraculous” Pauline conversion to respectable patriotism; interviewees who, within the new, and relatively loose, format of the *vox pop* sequence refer inconveniently to “Muslim” extremists, and must be hastily corrected on air; the earlier-mentioned Dagestani academic calling for a freer press). Appearances notwithstanding, we are no longer dealing in Channel 1 with a univocal, Soviet-style propaganda machine.

What is particularly interesting is the way in which news agendas are reworked, and often transformed, in non-news programming. This is especially true of the long “serial” form, of which there have been several interesting examples on Channel 1 recently. The most important, perhaps, is the “Reality TV” serial, *Shkola* (School), which traces the daily lives, conflicts and problems of teenagers and teachers in a typical Russian secondary school. Its hard-hitting, explicit approach to issues such as teenage sex, drug-taking, indiscipline, corruption and loose morals amongst teachers, caused it to become the subject of a heated debate in the Duma. One of the themes pursued is that of racism amongst pupils and the focus is on a Dagestani Muslim boy who is subjected to racist abuse and harassment by another boy with Nazi sympathies and a skinhead haircut. Bolder still is the suggestion that the boy is “egged on” by a nationalistic teacher who teaches a distinctly biased version of the official patriotic account of Russian history, and who establishes an extra-curricular club for “young patriots” with the attention of appointing the “skinhead” as its leader. The serial seems to warn of the dangers inherent in the Kremlin’s promotion of patriotism for the strong Russian state. Again, the relationship between broadcaster and state in Russia is much more complex and multi-faceted than we are sometimes given to believe by western commentators.

## France 2

As we suggested earlier, funding sources notwithstanding, France’s France 2 is by no means controlled by the government and cannot be described as a “state broadcaster.” Whilst it tacks closer to the official line than BBC1, it is committed to independence and does not appear to come under any direct pressure to do otherwise. When it comes to the problems raised by Islamic extremism, independence is perhaps more in evidence on the international than the domestic front. *Journal de 20 Heures*, has, for example, run some hard-hitting exposés of failures and errors in the Afghan and Iraq operations of which France is officially supportive. Nor has it been averse on occasion to airing subversive challenges to WoT

orthodoxy emanating from unofficial sources in the popular realm; thus in 2007, coverage of the anniversary of 9/11 featured a long report on the various conspiracy theories circulating on the American right, and suggesting that the US government was itself somehow implicated in the attacks; whilst in no way endorsing such theories, the report did, however, point to them as evidence of the pressures that post 9/11 mythology was coming under. Nor has the bulletin shied away from recognising the advantages offered by models of inter-ethnic integration other than the approved French version. One report in 2006 looked at a recent decision in a British health district to allow Muslim medical staff to wear the Islamic headscarf when appropriate and concluded that the decision had gone down well with staff and patients alike — hardly a message compatible with the official French line on the headscarf.

The same propensity for open-mindedness towards the policies and approaches of other countries can be observed on the domestic front too, as when France 2 became the forum for a debate over the merits of the British reliance on CCTV technology in combating the threat of terrorism, a debate which concluded, rightly or wrongly, that France had much to learn from its neighbour. However, as we noted earlier, France 2 is more or less fully signed up to the official consensus on *laïcité*, equality (in the given context, this is invariably equality between men and women) and free speech (often here, the right to criticise the Qu’ran). This can sometimes make strange viewing for those used to the more robustly Socratic style of BBC reporting; for example, when French intellectual, Robert Redeker, was forced into hiding by Islamic extremists incensed by his attack on the Qu’ran, an interview with him seem designed purely to provide him with a platform to denounce the enemies to his freedom to express his opinion, and to indulge in the construction of a “martyr narrative” around his admittedly bold stand. Like the other two channels, France 2 has assiduously promoted its version of the “moderate Muslim” as a means of opposing Islamic fundamentalism without alienating its large Muslim population, or inducing prejudice in the non-Muslim majority. In this case, “moderation” equates to a willingness to keep religious practice and ritual to the private sphere and a commitment to the French constitutional ideal. To reiterate, however, this amounts less to subservience than to an unwillingness to challenge what remains a fairly deeply embedded consensus in the French public realm as a whole.

## BBC I

Funded primarily by the license fee, and thus clearly a Public Service Broadcaster, the BBC is fiercely proud of its reputation for, independence, balance and neutrality. However, it is also committed by its Charter to uphold British values (including those of free speech, democracy and tolerance). In describing the actions and pronouncements of Islamic extremists, this dual remit comes under a level of stress which distinguishes the BBC from

most other national broadcasters. As we have indicated, and rather like France 2, there has been no shortage of reporting on the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan which adopts a sceptical distance from British government assurances that there is no alternative to the US-led presence in these countries. To give just one example, we might cite the conclusion to a BBC1 report on the 2007 9/11 commemoration: "As President Bush unveiled a memorial, he repeated his rationale for the wars that he launched, following these attacks ... But even as they remember, many doubt that." As public opinion has become more and more hostile in particular to the Iraq operation, with a growing perception that the British government has been less than open about the real reasons for the occupation, the BBC has accorded generous airtime to those who reject the official narrative. Recently it commented at length on a (mis)statement made at Prime Minister's Question Time in Parliament by Britain's new Deputy Prime Minister to the effect that the invasion of Iraq was "illegal."

Of all three broadcasters, the BBC, too, features the widest range of opinion on Islamic extremism on the domestic level. As well as the obligatory voices of the "moderate Muslims" who reject fundamentalism and support the British multicultural ideal, it is not unusual to find the BBC giving space to opinions deeply opposed to government policy. One example was a Muslim academic whose contempt for the "anti-radicalisation" money poured into Muslim communities by the last Labour government leads him to describe the policy as "like selling Christmas to a turkey" because of the damage that acceptance of the money would do to the reputation of Muslim organisations amongst their members. Moreover, there are occasions in which adherence to British values and trenchant, even vitriolic, critique of Muslim fundamentalism are fully aligned with one another; when a terror suspect is arrested for participating in an alleged plot to kidnap and behead a Muslim soldier, the report is meticulously neutral in its adherence to the "presumption of innocence" principle that defines British justice, refusing to speculate on the likely identity of the arrested man. However, this is in marked contrast to the tone of a report marking the sentencing of a Muslim preacher found guilty of inciting religious hatred, the completion of due legal process legitimising a vicious assault on the threat to "British values" that the preacher posed: "el-Faisal *preached his messages of hate* ... But the worshippers *kicked him out* ... he used meetings to *indoctrinate susceptible young men*... *His poisonous lectures* are still available..."

Paradoxically, precisely because of its relative independence vis-à-vis the state which ultimately, via the licence fee, funds, it, the BBC sometimes finds itself "fronting," the reshaping of public discourse, rather than trying passively to "catch up" with it; Griffin's invitation to appear on *Question Time* is one case in point; another is the burgeoning security culture to which we referred earlier. Thus, the BBC appointed its first full-time "security correspondent" (Frank Gardner) in 2001, and its security team has grown incrementally since then; the British Home Office established its Office for Security and Counter Terrorism only in 2007. Yet, as its consummate mastery of the close-up during coverage of 9/11

commemoration ceremonies demonstrates, the BBC's cherished and much-honed "independence from government, yet commitment to British values" line enabled it to detach images of individual, suffering mourners and harness them to an implied discourse of humanist universalism, deployed in turn as part of a powerful, yet reasoned critique of "WoT" commonplaces.

#### 4. WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THE REPORTING OF ISLAMIST VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CHANNEL'S CONSTRUCTION OF (A) NATIONAL IDENTITY AND (B) EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY?

##### Russian Channel I

The 2004 Beslan tragedy, known by some as "Russia's 9/11," instigated Putin's first open gesture towards rehabilitating the Soviet Union's role in the (re)construction of Russian identity. He linked this gesture implicitly to the notion of a Russia under threat from unnamed foreign forces, including Islamist terrorism. The identity of these forces was left conveniently vague, however, and despite Beslan's status as the point at which Russia inscribed itself into the global WoT, the space of Russia's Other has increasingly been occupied by an American-led "West." The latter is either held responsible for inciting (even bankrolling) Islamist extremism, or portrayed as hostile to the accommodation of official Islam and Orthodoxy driving the Eurasianist revivalism which now influences the Russian nation building project; Islam is depicted as one of Russia's official "state-forming" religions. As reflected on its main national television channel, Russia positions itself in a complex and shifting triadic relationship with Islam and a sometimes homogenised, sometimes internally differentiated, "West," rather than a dyadic Christian Self/Muslim Other model.

As (an albeit unsystematically managed) tool of the Kremlin, *Vremia* colludes in the state's positioning on national identity issues, respectfully marking official annual rituals like the anniversary of Beslan and "Day of National Unity," but also passively reproducing the discursive clashes these events inadvertently foreground, pitting populist Russian nationalism against official multiculturalism and inter-faith reconciliation. So, the 2006 report on Unity Day concentrates on the actions of the "Young Guard," the youth section of the party most loyal to Putin, United Russia. It broaches the movement's struggle to defeat nationalist extremism, but leaves its contradictory proposal to replace the phrase "multinational people" with "Russian people" in the country's constitution entirely without comment.

Likewise, *Vremia* displays a decidedly ambivalent and selective approach towards the liberal value system with which other national broadcasters mark their European-ness. On

one hand, when the Pope visited Turkey in 2006, it highlighted the European capacity for promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue. And its coverage of the *Charlie Hebdo* trial came down on side of “freedom of speech” or, as it put it “the freedom to laugh.” On the other hand, it pays scant attention to shared European values such as “the right to a free and fair trial,” reporting the capture, trial and sentencing of Islamic extremists in the Caucasus as the seamless activity of an efficient, justice-dispensing state machine. Under Medvedev, there has been a recalibration back towards emphasising respect for judicial process, human rights and a tolerant, rationalist “understanding” of the causes of terrorism. But the place of the European tolerance tradition in Russian public discourse is far from secure. In a Channel 1 talk show discussion following inter-ethnic riots in the Karelian town of Kondopoga, home of a significant Chechen-Muslim diaspora, the host, Vladimir Pozner, struggled to define the recent calque term *tolerantnost*’ and questioned its relationship with the older, Russian word *terpimost*’, with its connotations of passive “suffering” of the faults of others through “gritted teeth.”

There is, moreover, a disjunction between the way in which Russia, via its state broadcaster, positions itself on the European stage, and the stance it adopts for its own population. At a joint Italian-Russian press conference in 2007, Vladimir Putin stressed the importance of Russia’s and Italy’s shared Christian heritage — hardly a remark that sits easily with the “multinational, multi-faith people” mantra deployed at home. Russia struggles with accommodating its need to adopt a “civic” model of citizenship capable of integrating peoples of multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, with popular Russian sentiment in favour of a more essentialist, Russified identity. The tensions often surface in nation building “media events” (moments at which state and national broadcasters come together in joint endeavour, to paraphrase Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992, p. 16)) such as the recently instituted “National Unity Day.” In 2008, when the celebration featured a blood donation drive, *Vremia* edited together without comment a metaphorical claim by the *Nashi* youth movement that all peoples in Russia are “of one blood,” with right-wing extremist, Zhirinovskiy’s reminder to the crowd of the literal Russian blood spilt over the centuries to protect Europe from barbarians (victory over the Muslim Tatars to end Russia’s 2-century “yoke” were presumably not far from Zhirinovskiy’s thoughts at this point). The “biologisation” of civic identity is clearly not an easy feat to pull off!

## France 2

France 2’s general endorsement of French republicanism is reflected not only in the content of its reporting (coverage of a “sports facilities” dispute featured 3 times as many *vox pop* interviewees objecting to Muslim requests for separate arrangements for women as those endorsing the requests), but also in its own “performative” practices (the same report featured one shot from inside a swimming pool in which women are bathing in full view of

the peering eye of the camera, and another depicting Muslim men defiantly blocking off a sports hall from access to that same camera eye). Nonetheless, the French media, like other European media cultures, have not been averse to exploiting the “difference” that Muslim immigration has brought to the heart of European “civilisation” in order to revitalise it. In 1998 it was impossible to go anywhere in France without the gigantic face of the (non-practising) Muslim-Arab immigrant, Zinedine Zidane, and the rest of the multi-ethnic French football team that triumphed in that year’s World Cup, staring down from hoardings. And the regular *Journal de 20 Heures* reports on successfully integrated Arab Muslims are aimed not merely at countering the “threat” of inter-cultural tension, but at articulating a new model citizen, proud of his/her origins, yet fully committed to, and thus revitalising, the French republican ideal. Members of a family featured in one report are described as “practising Muslim[s], French and proud of it, at once very devout and very attached to the Republic.”

Elsewhere, however, the Muslim fundamentalist serves as a foil to offset a pristine republicanism intensified and re-asserted rather than modified and reinvigorated. In the Redeker coverage, the shocking words of the Muslim extremist threat (“I’ll skin you alive, you filthy son of a whore. I’ll find you and your family and kill you”) are followed by the France 2 interviewer’s supportive reminder to Redeker: “We need to remember that representatives of the Muslim community have taken your side and are taking part in these support rallies.” Islam must here, as in other contexts, oscillate between the two poles of a single antinomy: that of assimilated Frenchness, and that of the violent, decidedly un-French underside of a constitutional ideal.

Given France’s strong political endorsement of the “European project,” it is perhaps not surprising that French media reports on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism situate the nation implicitly (or, as we saw with the 9/11 commemoration report, explicitly) in the position of holder of the keys to a trans-European identity: an identity conceived with French republican principles very much in mind. Thus, the figures of Hirsi Ali, Salman Rushdie, Robert Redeker and other European “victims” of “Muslim fundamentalism,” are sometimes reeled off, mantra-like, as part of a process of constructing a continent-wide value system within which the familiar commitment to equality, freedom and secularism are defining features. It is interesting that in this context, British circumspection regarding the likes of Hirsi Ali, the cartoons scandal, the Muslim veil (whose banning was recently described as “un-British” by a Home Office minister) and even Rushdie (about whose case there was by no means full consensus within the UK establishment) places France, and the Europe made in its image, in the hard-line position of being willing to “face down” rather than indulge Muslim intolerance and aggression. By contrast, on the international front of the WoT, it is the neo-imperialist Anglo-American position that is portrayed as unduly harsh, and out of kilter with continental Europe’s more nuanced approach to the Islamic “threat.”

## BBC I

The 10 o’Clock News is likewise part of a media landscape in which various value “zones” overlap with one another and broadcasters, along with their respective nations, shuttle between them, reshaping their boundaries according to their own national perspectives. The BBC in particular migrates between a continental European and Anglo-American fields of consensus. Comparison is instructive. In September 2007 a bomb alert occurred in Frankfurt, close to the airport and a US military base. Whilst both the French and Russian coverage was disinterested and centred on the US’s status as an al Qaeda target, the BBC report portrayed the event as evidence of the “exporting” of the 7/7 model to a hitherto complacent continent: “The model we have seen here in the UK is transferring to other European countries ... Europe faces a challenge, *the whole of Europe* faces a challenge, for some time.” Conversely, BBC coverage of the Middle East and Iraq has aligned itself more closely with the European perspective, establishing distance from American interventionism and uncritical support for Israel. At least in the discursive sense, there is, we concluded, no single WoT, but rather multiple national wars on terror each constructed at the intersection of the various trans-national “zones,” and each laying claim to represent the essence of the global struggle.

The negotiation of the relationship between the global and the national produces challenges as well as opportunities, however. The need to avoid stoking the fires of anti-Muslim prejudice, thereby threatening national cohesion, must be reconciled with the resonance of the threat posed to nation states by a globalised terror network. In negotiating that relationship, the BBC resorts to a number of recurring narrative figures, including the “radicalisation” story (centring typically on the third-generation British Muslim male, radicalised at the local mosque, sent to Afghanistan for al Qaeda training and returned to the UK as a jihadist) and the “sleeping cell” (recent Muslim immigrants who secrete themselves at the heart of British institutions, the better to target them in terrorist attacks). Actual evidence casts doubt on the prevalence and accuracy of both models as sources of terrorist activities and on occasion (as when reporting the Glasgow airport bombing in 2007), the BBC oscillated unconvincingly between them.

But, as in France, the radical difference represented by the figure of the home-grown Muslim extremist has the potential to enhance as well as to undermine mediations of a vibrant nationhood. The construction of the suicide bomber as the obverse of an idealised Britishness was, perhaps, most potently revealed in the myth of the stoic heroism of the brave Londoner “getting on with his/her life” in the appalling aftermath of 7/7. (The uncomfortable mutual predication of opposites is conveyed in the title of Chris Morris’s subversively comic film about 4 British Muslim suicide bombers whose fraternal spirit is equated to that of the patriotic football fans proud of the 3 Lions on the England shirt: *4 Lions*.) We analysed the British media’s heroicisation of murdered Russian spy, Aleksandr



Litvinenko, the “outsider-as-insider” who actively chose British citizenship, in the same context. The Litvinenko saga coincided both with a period of heightened anxiety over Muslim terror plots, and with BBC reports exploring a “Britishness,” challenged by the local-born jihadist, the “insider-as-outsider” who betrays the British citizenship into which he is born for the alien ideology of “Islamism.” The story also played to post-imperial nostalgia for a time when James Bond strode the world fighting Soviet spies on behalf of Her Majesty’s government — an altogether more reassuring image than that of a diminished post-colonial nation facing an internal backlash from the children of the people it once ruled, now speaking in broad Yorkshire accents.

## CONCLUSION

To the extent that we were able to get a handle on the vast ocean of data that was the inevitable outcome of our trawl across the daily coverage of 3 national broadcasters (this, then, is one of the challenges of researching “everyday” news coverage of any issue), we found complex patterns of identities and distinctions. At the national level, the trends organise themselves into pairings which collectively authenticate the notion of an elusive Muslim “threat,” circulating and mutating within an intensely securitised European media space, inwardly fragmented, but outwardly cohesive. For example, like the BBC (and unlike Channel 1), France 2 news is saturated with more or less overt references to Islam in the context of violence. Like Channel 1 (and less like the BBC), there tends on *Journal de 20 Heures* to be something of a disjunction between the portrayal of domestic Muslim fundamentalism and the representation of the US-led campaign against the global al Qaeda threat. France 2 offers the clearest example of a tendency to “perform” constitutional principles in relation to the issues at stake. With its state-media symbiosis, Channel 1 displays an approach to Muslim extremism whose inconsistencies far outweigh those of other European channels. BBC1, meanwhile, makes the boldest pitch to frame Islam from a universalist perspective.

Overall, our analysis dispels the notion of a uniformly Islamophobic European media as resolutely as it rejects the proposition that news bulletins bear no responsibility for popular anti-Muslim sentiment. We also identified a single, coherent spectrum of moderation strategies of varying degrees of intensity and operating within nation-specific discursive environments. Grounded in European tolerance values, however, these strategies are sabotaged by the mutual incompatibility of some of the values, and by the stresses that the advent of Islamic militancy imposes upon them. Differing modes of contradiction, too, characterised the relationship of broadcasters to the states they represent, and to the post-imperial identities into engagement with which perceptions of rising “Muslim extremism” had thrust them.

At the highest level of abstraction, each broadcaster struggled differently to reconcile the corporeal specificity of real Muslims living in close proximity to indigenous populations with the disembodied essences of “national”/“European identities” or the “global al Qaeda network,” the localised effort to contain “Islamic radicalism” with the wider international security agenda, the here-and-now of particular instances of post 9/11 grief with the supranational potency of humanist values. Yet, the very intersection of ethno-cultural, faith-based and ideological attributes defining the image of the Muslim is what enables it, through its everyday currency within European public discourse, to reinvigorate, as well as to destabilise it.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Belorusskii format: nevidimaja realnost'* (*Belarusian Format: an invisible reality*) is a collection of research papers dedicated to the contemporary Belarusian media, politics, culture, and everyday life<sup>1</sup>. The book contains more than twenty papers dealing critically with multiple cultural phenomena in Belarus. These phenomena are primarily visual; however, they are called “invisible” by the authors. This paradox is easily explained by pointing out that visual culture, omnipresent in Minsk as in any contemporary city, in the form of billboards, television, digital photography, shop windows, and so on, is taken for granted and usually passed unnoticed by the citizen. Moreover, there are some segments of culture, which are always silenced or formatted in a particular way depending on the current political situation. Correspondingly, the aim of this book, as the editor, Almira Ousmanova puts it, is to examine what has been excluded and “to understand according to what rules and criteria (whether they are aesthetic conventions, business considerations or the censorial demands) the field of cultural production in contemporary Belarus functions” (p. 23).

The book is divided into five parts dealing with the problems of culture as a space of struggle for symbolic capital, political public relations strategies, patriotism on Belarusian television, the construction of national identity through cinema, and, finally, everyday life. The papers are critical of the practices of propaganda, naturalization, and the strengthening of the status quo by the current Belarusian authorities. The articles are concerned with particular case studies rather than with pure theoretical assertions. There are such cases as

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<sup>1</sup> It is one of the recent books issued by the publishing house of the European Humanities University in Vilnius within the series entitled *Visual and Cultural Studies*. Most of the authors are participants of a long-term interdisciplinary research seminar *Visual and Cultural Studies (Viscult)* and teachers at the European Humanities University, the former Minsk-based institution which was forced to relocate to Vilnius, Lithuania.

the visit of the Russian photographer Alexander Lapin to Minsk (Svetlana Poleschuk, “Critical notes on art photography in Belarus”), the concert “Solidary with Belarus” which took place in Warsaw in 2007 (Benjamin Cope and Siarhei Liubimau, “Music and the articulation of social cleavages: Buffalo Soldiers between Belarus and Poland”), or Andrei Kudinenko’s film *Mysterium Occupation* devoted to the Second World War (several articles). The objects of analysis are not only events or films but also discursive models (for example, the partisan model), language, graphic design, television programs, and urban everyday life. At the same time many of these case studies are theoretically grounded. The authors draw on Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Stuart Hall and other contemporary critical theorists. Gender, post-colonial studies and semiotics are also employed. In general the book seems to offer a theoretical unity, providing the reader with many interesting insights.

The first part of the book opens with a chapter by Elena Gapova which reveals the complexity of the situation in contemporary Belarusian culture by giving an example of the struggle around the national language. The plurality of political forces involved and the traditions referred to are conceptualized in a critical way, which reveals that Belarusian intellectuals contributed in fact to the interests of the new social classes. The role of intellectuals is analyzed by Olga Shparaga and Maxim Zhabankov in their contributions. Shparaga proposes to Belarusian intellectuals a constructive strategy which consists in breaking away from their representation as dissidents and partisans, so as to become actively present in the field of symbolic struggle. Zhabankov is concerned more with the future of an alternative culture and tries to outline some strategies in this area.

The figure of the partisan is the subject of three essays by Dar’ia Sitnikova, Inessa Khatkovskaia and Nadezhda Gusakovskaia. They try to deconstruct one of the Soviet stereotypes of Belarus as a country of partisans. Sitnikova describes the practices of censorship which homogenized the plurality of partisans’ motivations and erased differences between partisans in the time before and during the Second World War. Khatkovskaia and Gusakovskaia write about the practices of canonization of partisans in contemporary Belarusian cinema.

The residue of the Soviet visual vocabulary are discussed in Alexei Krivolap’s, Alexandr Sarna’s, and Olga Romanova’s chapters. Their cases are the Presidential Election in 2001, the performance of the national hymn on TV, and the military parade dedicated to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory Day. They bring to light some patriarchal elements in the official discourse and practices, which contribute to the construction of national identity.

Alla Pigalskaia and Dmitriy Korenko deal with the propagandist campaign “For Belarus!” which produced a series of billboards with this slogan. Pigalskaia discloses the ideological aspect of applied national graphic design, while Korenko studies the meaning of the image of the child on these billboards. An anthropological approach is pursued by several authors. Benjamin Cope analyses the presence of Soviet “spectres” in the architecture of

Minsk. His text is accompanied by several photographs of the city made by him. Alisher Sharipov and Elena Artamonova describe and conceptualise the city's cafes, and Viktor Martinovich deals with dress-codes in small towns.

Unfortunately, none of the critics tackle the question of audience reception. We also find that at times the researchers' constructivism takes on the form of activism, which seems detrimental to the critical process, especially when it is concerned with the problem of contemporary Belarusian intellectuals and their possible function in civil society. Despite this, the goal declared by Ousmanova in the introduction is achieved. The book provides a multidimensional picture of contemporary Belarusian culture and different approaches which encourage the reader to be sensitive to the ideology which saturates visual materials in the country. Overall, this book will be useful to a wide range of those interested in media and culture in the post-Soviet space.

Anna Arutunyan (2009) *The Media in Russia*. McGraw-Hill and Open University Press, 2009. vii+205pp. Index. ISBN: 9780335228898. \$46.00

**Reviewed by Birgit Beumers**

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A textbook on the Russia media is a welcome addition to a market saturated with expensive, academic publications on the topic, but Anna Arutunyan's *The Media in Russia* contributes relatively little that is new to the field, largely for two reasons: the author cannot decide whether to provide a history of media or analyse the present; and secondly, she is uncertain of her view on the recent re-nationalisation of the Russian media. This dilemma is further complicated by Arutunyan's unwillingness to conceptualise and a lack of coherence in the presentation.

The Introduction addresses the state of the Russian media today in terms of state vs. media or free press. Then it digresses into a historical debate on Russia's relation to the west, the messianic nature of Russian writing, and the absolutist role of the Russian state. The first chapter offers a survey of the media in Russia, with graphs to illustrate statistical data for television and radio; however, indistinct shading makes it impossible to discern individual segments (p. 20, 24) and no conclusions are drawn; information on the print run of papers is missing altogether. No account is given of the fluctuations in channel popularity (p. 18) and the description of TVC as a "short-lived, questionably independent station" (p.41) is not accurate: the station is owned by the Moscow government and still operates today. The name of the station's head (and earlier RTR managing director) Oleg Poptsov is not mentioned.

Chapter Two explores media ownership, but also contains errors. For example, the company VGTRK was not founded in May 1992, but was set up to support Yeltsin's election as president of RSFSR. Broadcasting of RTR started on 13 May 1991 and not in 1992. The closure of TV6 was, according to Arutunyan "not orchestrated by any known government asset" (p. 41) when it was the Press Ministry which revoked the licence. Oscillating between condoning state control and attacking dysfunctional press freedom, the writer seems to come down on the side of the government and offers a highly partial account, which labels the re-nationalisation as a "normal process." Arutunyan overlooks the role of the controversial paper *Novaia gazeta*, or the phenomenon of *Obshchaia gazeta* (published during the coup by several editors as their papers were outlawed), or the closed paper *Segodnia*.

Chapter Three discusses the freedom of the press and the high rate of murdered journalists in Russia, using this as a backdrop for a survey of the history of censorship in Russia from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present, yet Arutunyan dismisses the CPJ statistics that rank Russia as a high-risk country for journalists, arguing instead that many journalists were killed in combat situations (p. 70). Chapter Four provides a case study of *Moscow News*

before launching a historical survey of Russian newspapers from the imperial days to the present. This account is sweeping and largely uncritical. A section on glossy journals would have been much more informative here. Case studies are chosen at random, often omitting major events in media history (e.g. the role of newspapers during perestroika).

Chapter Five is devoted to television programming and film, and the author is again ill at ease with the facts: attributing the invention of montage to Eisenstein and Vertov ignores the work of Lev Kuleshov. “Hollywood would not be where it is today without the genius of Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein” may be a nice idea, but actually Eisenstein went to Hollywood to find out about new technologies and not teach Hollywood how to make films. But when we read that *Ivan the Terrible* was filmed in 1949 (p. 119) — a year after Eisenstein’s death in 1948 (Part I was released in 1945, Part II completed in 1946) — and that “the film managed to present an exemplary achievement of propaganda” (p. 119), we are left to wonder why Part II was banned until 1958. This is topped by the statement that “the government [was] acting as a sponsor to largely independent geniuses like Vertov and Eisenstein” (p. 120). There follows a jump from Vertov’s newsreels to the coverage of the 1991 coup and the Chechen war. The chapter contains no discussion of television programming (soaps, talk shows, reality shows).

The last two chapters are devoted to radio and internet. The discussion of radio is limited to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and neglects Voice of America or Radio Svoboda; the discussion of the internet leaves aside both the role of blogs as a source of information (and fact-fiction) and contains no references to control and legislation.

For a textbook, there are too many factual errors and ambiguous phrases. Spelling and consistency leave a lot to be desired, too: Guttenberg instead of Gutenberg (p. 85); Benkendorf instead of von Benckendorff (p. 89); Edmund Burk instead of Burke (p. 185) and Gorbachev wrongly described as the president of the Soviet Union as early as 1985 (p. 185). In the footnotes, not all titles are italicised and not all are translated; the transliteration is inconsistent. Finally, some major English sources are missing from the bibliography, which relies largely on Russian university textbooks for journalists. No mention is made of Ellen Mickiewicz’s books on television, John Murray’s study of the press, or Ivan Zassoursky’s *Media and Power in post-Soviet Russia* (2004). Likewise, the collections by Stephen Hutchings, Birgit Beumers and Natalia Rulyova (eds.) *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals*, (2009) and *Globalisation, Freedom and the Media after Communism* (2009) are not mentioned.

*The Image of a Decent Life in the Contemporary Russian Mass Media* (2008) [Образ достойной жизни в современных российских СМИ]. (Yekaterinburg: Ural University Press) 288 pps. ISBN 978-5-7525-1821-8.

**Reviewed by Tatiana V. Vorontsova**

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This book was written as part of a three-year Russian-Finnish interdisciplinary project entitled “Making a ‘Good Life’. Post Soviet Selves in the Russian Mass Media 1980-2006.” The authors’ approach is based upon an assumption of the dual nature of media texts: they actively shape and change the context within which they exist, being themselves products of this context. The core problem of the study is how Russian contemporary mass media (re)produce the system of values. One of the selected indicators is a complex set of concepts involving *good society, good life, welfare, happiness, well-being, decent life*.

The book consists of four sections. Its structural principle is explained in a succinct informative introduction by Maria Litovskaya, Arya Rosenholm, Irina Savkina and Elena Trubina. The authors of the first section explore the socio-linguistic and linguo-culturological transformation of the concept of “dignity” in contemporary Russia. Olga Mikhailova writes about dignity as a sort of alienated property with parametric distinctions; an insight into legal discourse reveals that it is the essential property of an individual irrespectively of how he/she and the others perceive and evaluate his/her personality. Irina Vepreva and Natalya Kupina note that the adjective “decent” in the expression “a decent/worthy life” (even though it is closely linked with material well-being) has not lost its immediate associations with moral qualities. In the meantime, Yulia Pikuleva reveals a change in the meaning of the adjective “decent/worthy”: for example, the construction “a decent person/man/woman” is becoming obsolete and is being replaced with such expressions as “worthy of someone/something.” Tatyana Kruglova finds that the disappearance of the concept “labor” and its replacement in post-Soviet times with the concept of “business” represents the essential basis of good life. She suggests that it is triggered not only by transformation of political landmarks but by the transition of society to a new, postindustrial phase.

The second section of the book is dedicated to health as a key life value and an indicator of “decent life.” Marina Bondarik argues that media coverage of the national project “Health” is more focused on health reform and those in charge of its implementation rather than public health. Olga Shek and Pauliina Aarva investigate texts about alcohol consumption. They establish that it can be positively viewed as the essential part of recreation and pleasure and, simultaneously, it can be criticized as a cause of degradation and as a health threat. Ilkka Pietila and Olga Shek underline that, while telling of the various



difficulties that make their lives stressful, Russians tend to either feel nostalgic about Soviet times, envy Western living standards or perceive an improvement in their life as something that may happen in a very distant future.

The authors in the third section consider the extent to which Soviet and post-Soviet phenomena are represented in the Russian mass media and to which potential audiences these media messages are addressed. An interaction between the old perception of the good life and the new consumerist paradigms is constructed in different ways, such as mutual annihilation, dialogue and unification (sometimes accompanied by strange “chimeric forms”). Alexander Zelenin, who explores changing attitudes towards nature and its presentations in *Nauka i Zhizn* journal over the past 25 years (1980 through 2005), states that nature has become a component of the concept of “decent life” and is perceived today as a commodity. Through the example of the Russian version of *Pets* magazine Arya Rosenholm demonstrates the ways conversations about pets (now a symbol of cultural capital) contribute to perceptions of acceptable and desired lifestyles.

By comparing American, Finnish and Russian versions of the TV show *The Last Hero* and the concepts of money in this reality show, Natalya Mikhailova considers specific features of the Russian version of the show. According to her, contemporary Russians still combine Western models of attitudes towards money and consumption practices with their Soviet experiences. Irina Savkina explores attitudes towards the “good life” by drawing distinctions between ideological, social and cultural values in Russia and Finland. Her study of Karelian publications about holidays in Finland identified indicators of the good life that journalists, tour operators and tourists themselves mentioned as desirable and available in Finland, yet lacking in Russia.

The fourth section is dedicated to a study of “glamor” magazines. Elena Trubina, evaluates the claims of glossy magazines to cultural authority, and outlines their role as key agents for the aestheticization of the world around us. Through the example of *Biznes i zhizn'* (*Business and Life*) magazine Olga Shaburova exposes problems in representation of bourgeois consumer practices for the Russian audience. She identifies Russian media traditions and the inconsistent value system of the Russian business class (with its controversial symbiosis of the Soviet and post-Soviet) as possible explanatory factors. Saara Ritalainen considers the discourses of “personal and general history” through the example of the oldest and most popular women’s magazine *Krestyanka*. She looks at the changes that have occurred since 1986, and the ways the magazine appeals to its readership. Margarita Gudova and Irina Rakipova speculate on why there are no glamour magazines for elderly people in Russia and what models of the “good life” these magazines could offer them. Maria Litovskaia dedicates her article to the analysis of contemporary magazines for teenage girls. These magazines, in her view, are intended to bridge a gap between contradictory values; they are doing so by playing on mutually exclusive trends, deconstructing and re-instating the same stereotypes and norms.

Isaac A. Blankson and Patrick D. Murphy (eds) (2007) *Negotiating Democracy: Media Transformations in Emerging Democracies* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 285 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7914-7233-0, (hdbk). \$75.00; ISBN 978-0-7914-7234-7, (pbk). \$24.95

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*Negotiating Democracy: Media Transformations in Emerging Democracies* is a collection of thirteen papers written by sixteen contributors that explores, as co-editor Patrick Murphy says in his introductory paper, “the relationship between media and democracy within the broader phenomena of globalization” (p. 2). The strength of the volume lies in the fact that, far from being abstract contemplations on what is undoubtedly an extensive theme, the majority of contributions are thoroughly researched case studies investigating “the core issue of in whose interest and benefit are media and new communication technologies being used to reshape nations and “democratize” the flow of information and capital” (p. 1). The result is a book that is, for the most part, informative, engaging, and rich in empirical detail.

The first part of the book, “Regional Trends in Media and Democracy,” includes three chapters that focus respectively on Africa, Central America, and “the New Europe” (primarily nations in Eastern, Central, and South-eastern Europe). While broad in scope, generalizations are avoided by the inclusion of numerous examples drawn from individual countries, particular civil initiative organisations, specific media outlets, and local events within these large and diverse geographic regions. These set the tone for the rest of the volume, alerting readers to the very complex interplay, in terms of both intra-national and international forces, between power, politics, technology, economics, civil society, and media production, ownership, legislation, access, and development.

More detailed case studies are found in the remaining two parts of the book with chapters on Cambodia, Taiwan, Nigeria, Iran, (South) Korea, reality television in the Arab World, Mexico, Bulgaria, and Greece. Many of these begin with some kind of national history and analysis, all of which are highly informative (if a somewhat depressing inventory of twentieth century authoritarian, military, and stubbornly oppressive governments), especially given that most readers’ speciality knowledge is unlikely to encompass all of these. Several of these chapters deserve special mention, largely due to the control of the material and the clarity of the writing: Drew McDaniel’s assured, enlightening description of Cambodia’s brutal history and subsequent media rehabilitation; Chuka Onwumechili’s analysis and discussion of the anomaly of Nigeria’s liberalization of national media under the return of a military dictatorship; Mehdi Semati’s clearly structured and fascinating discussion of media, the state, and the prodemocracy movement in Iran; and Marwan

Kraidy's thoroughly absorbing exploration of three reality television programmes broadcast across the Arab world and the public discourse surrounding them, a preliminary analysis for Kraidy's recently published monograph *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

What emerges from these chapters, and from the collection as a whole, is a composite picture made up of interconnected strands of particularities (national, sub-national, regional, and historical) and commonalities across societies and contexts. To "ferret out" these different characteristics is, as Kenton Wilkinson writes in his paper on Mexican television, "a formidable challenge to researchers" (p. 206), and I admit to expecting, or hoping for, some kind of (editorial) analysis that could begin to draw these threads together in some way. Perhaps the detailed index partly compensates for this. Nevertheless, the key words of the title – *negotiating, transformations, emerging* – are an accurate indication of the major themes and observations of these papers: that media and political structures are intricately connected and that change, reform, and development are never simply linear and never simple. It is the constant crossover of, and jostling between, regulation, liberalization, commercialization, corruption, repression, diversity, action, and inertia that make this book relevant and interesting for a wide audience. Those who will find it useful include researchers, teachers and students not just of media, or even media and politics, but also scholars of cultural studies, sociology, area studies, economics, and international law.

Although none of these case studies make online technologies and communication their focus, each chapter briefly outlines very recent changes in this area. Much of the material here identifies new points of discussion and ongoing lines of further investigation, particularly in these areas of online media. With the continuing development of technology, people's access to it, and the desire of governments to control that access, the stories of this book linking media and political structures in and across nations and regions in a globalized and globalizing world will continue to be elaborated and enacted for some time.

Greg Simons (2010). *Mass Media and Modern Warfare: Reporting on the Russian War on Terrorism* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited) 218 pps. ISBN: 978-0-7546-9957-6, \$55.00

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Simons' recent book addresses the growing tension related to the perception of media's intensified influence in modern warfare and questions whether that perceived influence gives the state justification to encroach on press freedoms. Simons' early clarification of terrorism as a process of political communication gives him the opportunity to approach the role of media from all sides, though his account is overwhelmingly a top-down exploration focusing on Russia's elite. The book is divided into five chapters, integrating analytically-driven academic insights within a broad and thoughtful reflection on how the Russian media is constrained and controlled in various stages of its organization and communication.

The first chapter establishes Russia as a pristine laboratory for examining the interactions of the state and media as Simons dissects the transformation in mass media control in the post-Soviet era. Glasnost and perestroika fractured the media's unconditional subservience to the state and precipitated a power struggle between rival conservative and reformist factions until Boris Yeltsin's Presidency engendered the "Golden Years" of press freedom (p. 21). But the financial pressures of market capitalism soon created a need for powerful private sponsors to provide funding that the weakened Russian state couldn't muster. "The oligarchs" took on this sponsorship and the media influence it yielded (p. 22). All of this took place in about a decade, before the media returned to another period of government influence and dynamic tension with the state under Putin and now Medvedev.

Given this flux, the current behavior of the state towards the media in adapting to the War on Terrorism seems unique and familiar at the same time. The unpredictability of the situation is reflected in the big-hype controversies Simons references, such as when Putin advised a French reporter about circumcision during a back-and-forth on Chechnya (p. 23). While the government is at times visibly struggling to adapt to a new international and domestic environment, Simons reminds us that the liberal "façade" in Russia is combined with the state's continued influence over the press. It was predominantly a masterful PR campaign that spurred Putin's "rapid rise to power," and once in office, despite his occasional gaffs, Putin demonstrated a control over the media far stronger than both Gorbachev and Yeltsin (p. 39). Amid the uncertainty, it is clear that the Russian government has restored its ability to "develop and shape perception in society" (p. 40).

The paradox of Russia's change and continuity reemerges in Simons' second chapter (a review of his prior research on Russian censorship) where he describes the laws governing

media in Russia as “among the most free in the world,” noting, however, that the “reality on the ground differs from those ideals...” (p. 57). Simons’ focus in the chapter is on the rationale and history of formal state controls, though self-censorship is a recurrent theme. Fear of state retribution and the accompanying financial instability is a motivating factor for publishers to take on the burden of censorship themselves, and as such, self-censorship instills a multiplier effect on formal government checks.

The brunt of Simons’ analytically-backed findings lies in chapter three, where he relies on “rhetorical theory” to unpack “fragments of speech by key political actors in Russia” (61). Simons articulates specific “rhetorical frames” which have taken shape in regards to Russia’s conflict in Chechnya. The first two frames overlap, calling for both unity and an end to double standards in the Global War on Terrorism. These frames convey the Russian media’s attempts to draw parallels between the Russian operation in Chechnya and the United States-led coalition against Al Qaeda in an effort to use the momentum emerging after the 9/11 attacks to justify Russia’s own actions in the Caucasus. While Simons’ analysis of these frames is helpful, one is left pondering the more nuanced question of how these themes were defined and maintained in relation to potentially conflicting messages, such as Russia’s opposition in the United Nations to the United States-led invasion of Iraq, which was similarly justified, in part, on grounds of unity against state harbors of terrorism.

The fourth chapter, “The Russian Media at War,” reviews the Russian media’s portrayal of terrorism in general and in specific instances, such as the ominous post-9/11 emphasis on terrorist threats. This attempt to unite the nation against terrorism and justify the strengthening of state authority actually came close to undermining state control by inciting public panic. As a counterstrategy, the Russian government leaked “good” stories concerning victories over and aversions of terrorists and terrorism (p.105). Simons describes how some journalists attempted to evade Kremlin censorship by reporting undesirable or “‘negative’ news” about the government by simply quoting western media sources. However, Simons warns against any optimistic reaction to this by recounting the murder of activist columnist Anna Politkovskaya (p. 117).

The fifth chapter unpacks one aspect of the internet’s role in the Russian media’s reporting of the war on terrorism by using the website Kavkaz.org as a case study. The author reasons that Kavkazcenter, a hub of news and information broadcast from Chechen separatists, has the dual effect of breaking the state’s hegemonic control over information relayed from Chechnya and also driving the authorities into a defensive cycle of reactions to news coming out of Chechnya. Simons successfully provides an in-depth analysis of Kavkazcenter, and the Russian internet space in general, without becoming mired in the academic frenzy over the internet’s impact on communication in general.

*Mass Media and Modern Warfare* is a well-documented overview suitable for both Russian and non-Russian scholars. And while the book paints an overall glib picture of Russia’s trajectory, it maintains an objective posture that adds credibility to its conclusions. One

limitation noted throughout the book, however, is a certain incoherence. Some of the chapters are not “glued” well with the others. While Simons guides the reader by articulating specific questions he plans to address at the outset of each chapter, and uses subheadings within chapters, it proves insufficient to maintain a defined focus throughout the book.

Furthermore, it might prove fruitful to explore in greater detail some of the presuppositions on which Simons’ book relies, not least of which is the overall impact of the Russian media in the War on Terrorism. Simons begins his book by comparing journalists to combatants with respect to their impact on modern warfare. However, if one considers the Russian audience and the emerging patterns in Russian media, this analogy becomes ambiguous. In today’s Russia, “since President Putin came to power in 2000 there has been a significant de-politicization of Russian television, reflected in a change in the balance between politics and entertainment in favor of the latter” (Dunn, 2008, p. 44). This trend might be taken to caution scholars against overstating the Russian media’s impact in matters of politics. Finally, a comprehensive analysis of the audience’s reaction is an important variable in determining the actual impact of certain media messages regarding the war on terrorism. While Simons’ book includes a few paragraphs on the audience, an expansion of this theme would be a welcome complement to this well-crafted volume.

## REFERENCE

John A. Dunn (2008). Where did it all go wrong? Russian television in the Putin era. In B. Beumers, S. Hutchings, and N. Rulyova (Eds.), *The Post-Soviet Russian media: Conflicting signals*. London: Routledge.

Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener, Natalja Konradova (Eds.), *Control + Shift. Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2009) 336 pps. ISBN 3-8334-4988-8. € 24,90.

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The collection of articles, published under the title *Control + Shift. Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet* is unique in many ways. First of all, it is a quest for new instruments for studying the dynamic development of the *on-line* world and for a new vocabulary to render scientific descriptions of virtual phenomena. This book brings together under one cover a group of authors from different countries and research fields. However, it is not disjointed. The contributions are unified through several common lines of academic inquiry.

Among the most important themes are the interest in studying the Russian Internet with respect to cultural identity and the attempt to address the question of the RuNet's role in liberalizing Russia and creating civil society institutions. The framework of cultural identity was applied in several articles investigating individuals and (virtual) personalities (Eugene Gorny, Andrei Gornyx and Almira Ousmanova), studying virtual communities (Roman Lejbov, Schmidt, Katy Teubener, Nils Zurawski, Natalja Konradova, Olga Goriunova), and reflecting the global internet environment, and the RuNet, as a historically developing part of the public sphere (Anna Bowles, Ekaterina Kratasyuk, Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener). Significantly fewer articles deal with the issue of freedom of the press and liberalisation in Russia. Most of the authors take it for granted that the Internet is *a priori* a territory of freedom and creativity. An exception here is, perhaps, Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener, who in the article entitled “(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet,” express their doubts about the possibility of free self-expression in the RuNet, considering the control exercised over it by various political forces.

Most of the articles are of a descriptive nature, presenting the development of the Internet in Russia in its relationship to the cultural and political situation in the country. Among them are chapters by Bowles “The Changing Face of the RuNet,” Schmidt, Teubener “(Counter)Public Sphere(s) on the Russian Internet,” Gorny “Russian LiveJournal. The Impact of Cultural Identity on the Development of a Virtual community,” Lejbov “Expert Communities on the Russian Internet: Typology and History.” In these contributions, the elements of cultural and social analysis often play more of an embellishing than a constitutive role. This is, most likely, in accord with the objective, which is to familiarize Western readers with the Russian Internet, the redistribution of influence within some of its

virtual communities, the political trends and relevant projects running through the RuNet, such as various expert communities, as described by Roman Lejbov.

Among the most topical articles in the collection are Kratasyuk's "Construction of 'Reality' in Russian Mass Media News on Television and on the Internet" and Schmidt, Teubener, Zurawski's "Virtual (Re)Unification? Diasporic Cultures on the Russian Internet." Here the authors' analytical inquiry is supplemented by rich and interesting factual data. The contribution by Gornyxh and Ousmanova, entitled "Aesthetics of Internet and Visual. On the RuNet's essence and specificity" stands by itself due to its theoretical nature. The authors historicize the Internet by exposing the genesis of its architectonics and rethinking it as a new cultural form, which borrows from the preceding cultural forms of cinema and television. They employ the interpretative strategies of visual studies to uncover the specific nature of the Net's aesthetics as well as to trace the roots of the Internet's inherent structure, which follows the logic of the contemporary stage of capitalism.

On the whole, the exceptional nature of the Internet as an object of research inquiry created a number of obstacles for the authors to tackle. First of all, there is the question of the Internet's boundaries. What is the Russian Internet, or the RuNet? Does it mean all the websites located on domains, registered in the Russian Federation? Or, perhaps, it refers to all the Russian-speaking internet services or to all internet users residing in Russia, or in the post-Soviet region? The authors refrain from producing a single working definition of the RuNet, choosing to leave this issue open.

One more obstacle is the dynamic pace of change of the RuNet, making almost any results, so to say, "perishable goods." Many authors in the collection comments on this. However, it does not prevent us from questioning how relevant the information presented by them is. Sometimes, depending on the author's approach, the article can be regarded as more of a contribution to the history of the RuNet, rather than an analytical consideration of its *status quo*. As the authors note, the texts published in "Control + Shift" might become "data" for a future scientific reflection when studying the Internet.

The authors find it difficult to deal with various methodological issues when studying the RuNet. For instance, the author of "Netting Gender" Olena Goroshko selects a hundred respondents (fifty men and fifty women) from her own email address book, assuming that her survey is representative, and extrapolates the conclusions to the wider RuNet audience. According to her, the most popular male internet activities are "conducting scientific research," "obtaining necessary information" and "communication by e-mail." At the same time, men show no interest in pornography and online games, while women's least popular activity is internet shopping. However, this curious example is more of an exception, which explicates the delicate nature of the virtual environment as an object of academic inquiry. In most of the cases, the authors were careful enough with their research procedures and methods. Most of them used data derived from several influential research centers, such as, for instance, the Public Opinion Fund.



Despite the above-mentioned concerns, the collection is one of the best sources on the Russian Internet and can be recommended to a wider readership interested in various RunNet phenomena ranging from male literature of Udaff.com, diasporic cultures to the issue of general aesthetics. The book will be useful for media specialists and all those interested in the recent developments of the Russian-speaking Internet.

Galina Kozhevnikova, in collaboration with Alexander Verkhovsky and Eugene Veklerov, *Ultra-Nationalism and hate crimes in Contemporary Russia, The 2004-2006 Annual Reports of Moscow's SOVA Center* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2008) ISBN 978-3-89821-868-9. \$30.09

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As Stephen Shenfield states in his foreword to this volume, this study aims to provide its readers with a detailed and systematic analysis of the issue of ultra nationalism in Russia during the second half of Putin's presidency. Despite the somewhat brief period under investigation, this collection of three analytical reports from the Russian-based analytical centre SOVA Center (2004-2006) delivers a nuanced and multi-faceted analysis of this complex issue for contemporary Russia.

Each of the reports assembled in this collection begins by exploring the nature of these ultra-nationalist groups and xenophobia in Russia. Secondly, these reports investigate the success and failure of dealing with these radical nationalist groups by the Russian state through the judicial system, the responses from the victims of these crimes, and the rise in the number of civil society groups seeking to challenge this phenomenon. Finally each report considers the ever-growing role played by ultra nationalism in Russian politics and the way in which the Russian political system and authorities appear to utilise some of the radical rhetoric for their own political ends, at the same time as they re-iterate their commitment to fight extremism and xenophobia in Russia.

In the 2004 Annual Report (the first one in this volume) the authors argue that many of the negative trends of the previous years continued, particularly in relation to the incidence of spontaneous inter-ethnic clashes, the use of nationalist slogans in electoral politics, and the continuous lack of political will to deal with the widening xenophobia across society. The growing violence and intimidation of certain ethnic and religious groups together with the rising prominence and greater role of movements such as the National Imperial Party of Russia, Party of Freedom and the Movement against Illegal Immigration resulted in radical nationalism "acquiring a more systematic, organised and public character" (p. 17). Despite recognising the existence of skinheads in Russia and some half-hearted attempts made to deal with the most violent nationalist crimes, the authorities continued to passively lend support, or at least turn a blind eye to, the activities of these groups. In fact, victims of this violence were often blamed by the authorities for bringing this violence upon themselves, especially if they tried to retaliate against the assailants.

This situation took a turn for the worse in 2005, when the increasing prominence of the radicals translated into the ever rising number of victims at the hands of these groups,

particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As part of their political strategies, radical nationalists used ever more sophisticated communication strategies and PR campaigning with prominent xenophobic slogans such as Rodina's posters entitled "Let us clean the city of garbage" and "Moscow for Muscovites" to garner support from the Russian public. The growing inter-linkages and joint activities between radical nationalists and other movements such as the radical youth movement and the Cossack groups in Southern Russia widened the constituent membership and focus of radical nationalists in 2005. On the wider political front "the problem of xenophobia became a useful instrument of political manipulation deployed to intimidate democratically oriented electorates." As the 2005 report goes on to suggest, "dead set on opposing the mythical 'orange threat' and motivated by their own xenophobic attitudes and personal interests, members of political elites preferred to remain passive at best, and collaborate with leaders and ideologists of Russia's right-wing radicalism at words." In this period Russian elites thus continued to underestimate the danger posed by groups on this right wing political spectrum.

In the final report in this collection, 2006, the authors recount how Russia "witnessed the active and ubiquitous expansion of ethno-nationalism both in public life and in official domestic policies" (p. 111). The growth in radical nationalist public rallies and marches headed by groups such as the Movement against Illegal Immigration together with the growing links between different radical nationalists such as the skinheads and the Orthodox fundamentalists as seen during their anti-Gay Pride marches in May 2006 led to a "rapid escalation of xenophobic manifestations" (p. 112). The events during the inter-ethnic clashes in Kondopoga and the anti-Georgian campaign, in the same year, highlighted once again the expansion that ultra-nationalism was making into Russia's public and political life. Following the violence in Kondopoga, even President Putin highlighted the importance of protecting interests of the "indigenous Russian population" in retail and trade sectors. Despite several positive trends (the rising rates of prosecution of these radical groups and the consolidation of anti-ultra nationalist forces) these efforts were insufficient to stop this growth in radical nationalism.

Overall this work succeeds in providing a very detailed and meticulous study of the problems of ultra-nationalism in Russia. Nevertheless, or perhaps as a direct result of this focus on detail, this volume would have greatly benefited from the inclusion of a solid introduction with a broader context and wider setting for these three stand-alone analytical reports. Similarly, a more extensive conclusion would have enabled the authors to bring together all the different strands and themes explored in each of the separate reports.

In sum, this is a very thought-provoking and detailed study for anyone interested in learning more about the phenomenon of ultra nationalism in contemporary Russia.